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**The Journal of the Society for
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Autumn 1974

SOVIET FILM STYLICS

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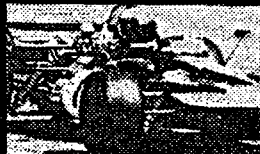
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ESL

When *Screen* first published translations from the works of the Russian Formalists in v 12 no 4, Winter 1971/2, the editorial of that issue pointed out that this initiative had been taken because 'these debates are reflections upon and struggles with notions of realism which *Screen* regards as crucial to any understanding of the cinema in the past and at the moment'. Although the investigation of the concept of realism, its implications and function within the realm of aesthetics and ideology in general, undoubtedly did form the central focus of *Screen's* theoretical preoccupations at that time, that same editorial briefly mentioned a few other points which have since then come to occupy a more crucial position in the magazine: the politics of cultural struggle (eg, the issues on Neo-Realism and on Brecht) and the relation between verbal language and the cinema.

Y Eikhenbaum's seminal text 'Problems of Film Stylistics' discusses one of the major tasks facing film theory today, which, as Metz put it, is 'understanding how films are understood'. In discussing the specificity of the Language of Film, Eikhenbaum avoids making the negative distinction between film language and verbal language which was to become all the rage with the defenders of 'pure' cinema. Instead, he introduces the fruitful comparison with internal speech, thereby stating that a film is an utterance characterised by its own evolving rhetoric, but that its mode of production is governed by language.

For if a film does indeed possess a semiotic function, it must be founded on an implicit language. That language which Eikhenbaum calls *internal speech*, is organised according to specific modalities and conditions through association, which, even internally, have not found a linguistic manifestation in the ordinary sense, hence the difficulty for instance in transferring from internal to external discourse. He differs in this respect from the ideas put forward by the Prague Circle in their Theses of 1929. For them, on a formal level, internal speech is equivalent to manifest, ie, externalised speech. However, Eikhenbaum also claimed that the mental activity of internal speech was absent from everyday life, a notion corrected by the Prague Theses. Yet, examining the conditions of construction of a filmic discourse, Eikhenbaum notes that the referential function, that is the context, must be known and to some extent must become conventionalised to allow for the production of stereotypes, clichés, immediately recognisable by the viewer. Moreover, and in this Eikhenbaum holds a view very similar to Eisenstein's, he sees motivation (psychoanalytic and diegetic) as the effective organising principle of the filmic internal discourse. Thus the modalities of the filmic discourse, like those of internal speech, bear some relation to the processes at work in dreams, hence the need for the introduction

in this context of psychoanalytic concepts in the study of filmic discourse, as became evident from certain aspects of the examination of the structure of fetishism in the Brecht issue (v 15, no 2). This line of theoretical investigation will be continued in the next issue by Paul Willemen.

A major part of the present issue is devoted to a tribute to the work of Osip Brik, the 'forgotten' formalist. One of the original members of Opoyaz, with Mayakovsky, and one of its major political spokesmen, Osip Brik himself produced few theoretical writings. His contribution to the Formalist movement is rather to be found in his role within the group, as an internal critic and in developing the practice of a group creativity. Brik appears to have occupied a very special place within that group, and therefore, by extension, within the cultural struggles in the twenties in Soviet Russia. He provided a substantial amount of the material conditions for the production of *Lef*, and he also appears to have played the role of disseminator/stimulator of ideas. Roman Jakobson remarked in a rather unkind moment that Shklovsky merely picked up and expanded the ideas Brik had put forward in the discussions held at Brik's flat. From Brik's artistic activities, it appears that he felt more comfortable in the role of 'text-transformer', ie, by working on the transformation of existing texts: he produced critical readings of cultural movements, poetic texts, he wrote adaptations of existing texts, translating them into other media, but perhaps most of all, he transformed the verbal discourse of his friends in discussions (as appears to have been the case with Shklovsky). Whether it was because of his personality or because of his political commitment, Brik was a passionate believer in the virtues of collective work, or rather, work organised within groups of people who shared the same theoretical and political positions. It is this aspect of his contribution which renders it extremely difficult to pinpoint exactly what constitutes his individual theoretical contribution to Formalist theory. On the other hand, to pass over this contribution precisely because of this difficulty, would be the same as subscribing to the view that cultural history is made by individual and original minds who, even if literary historians categorise them in groups, would have achieved the same 'greatness' in splendid isolation. Apart from the intrinsic interest of Brik's work as a transformer of texts, his function in the group holds important political lessons for the work of theoretical/artistic groups today. As a public spokesman for the group, as a cohesive force and stimulator within the group, and as a defender of the need for intellectuals/artists to organise on the basis of aesthetic/theoretical principles as well as political ones, Brik's practice underlines the point, as the editorial of our first Formalist issue put it, that

'it is not adequate to theorise or to struggle, say, for a more

- 6 radical educational and film practice (as Soviet Artists did) without precise attention being paid to how film culture and film education are organised and administered and to combat where necessary at this political level organisation and administration. Ideas, films do have immense power, but those in power have even more.'

In the past, *Screen's* relation to British film culture and film making has been unclear, to say the least. The editorial board has therefore decided to introduce a regular column in the journal, concentrating on issues, events and films directly relevant to the present conjuncture of British film culture. In this issue, a polemical trailer for this section has been included in the form of an interview with Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen. The interview can be described as polemical in the sense that the ideas discussed in it as well as the film itself may appear totally aberrant when seen in the context of British film culture at the present time.

KARI HANET
PAUL WILLEMEN

This is the last issue of *Screen* to appear under the editorship of Sam Rohdie, who has left to take up a teaching post in New York. The first issue that he edited, v 12 no 1, Spring 1971, was marked by a change of the format of *Screen*, but more importantly by a change in the content and policy of the magazine. The existing literature on film was dominated by different forms of impressionistic and intuitive criticism, at best derived from some version of the *politique des auteurs* or practical criticism predominant in English literature teaching. SEFT was concerned that the embryonic development of film studies in secondary and tertiary education should not be directed by default into the rut of traditional literary studies; to avoid this a genuinely theoretical understanding of film was a precondition. It was for the implementation of the policy this implied, and that he endorsed in an article in the same issue of *Screen*, that Sam Rohdie was appointed editor of the magazine, and the development of film theory was made its major concern. Insofar as the magazine has successfully carried out the policy, credit for that success is due to more than one person. Nevertheless, without Sam Rohdie's encouragement and organisation, anything *Screen* has achieved would have been impossible. The policy for whose initial implementation he was so largely responsible will continue to be pursued by the magazine in the future.

Screen EDITORIAL BOARD

Boris Eikhenbaum

I

The arts as such, as natural phenomena, do not exist; rather, there is a need for art that is peculiar to man. This need is satisfied in different ways in different epochs, different nations, and different cultures. Separate elements of nature which have entered into the structure of human existence are singled out and, when exposed to a specific culture, become the basis of one art or another. As the material of art, these elements should possess certain qualities or 'potentials', and should have special kinds of relationships to everyday reality. These relationships change; and the very forms of art change, as well as their arrangement.

Film did not immediately become an art form. One must distinguish two moments in its history; first, the invention of an apparatus which made it possible to reproduce movement on the screen; and second, the utilisation of this apparatus to transform film stock into motion pictures. In the first stage the cinematograph was simply an apparatus, a mechanism; in the second, it became a special instrument in the hands of the cameraman and director. Neither stage, of course, appeared by accident. The former was a natural result of technical advances in the field of photography, the latter a natural and necessary result of new artistic demands. The former stage relates to those inventions which develop along the laws of their own logic; the latter should rather be defined as a discovery: it so happened that the motion-picture camera could be used for the organisation of a new art – an art for which a demand has long existed.

The inventors of the motion-picture camera probably did not realise that they were creating the conditions for organising a new art. It is characteristic that approximately twenty years elapsed before film technique was recognised as a technique of filmic art. In the first years interest was concentrated primarily on the illusion of movement. Film was considered a technological gimmick, and did not go beyond the principle of a moving photograph. Nothing was said either of scenarios or of montage. Until 1897 there was no thought even of splicing. The technological improvement of the camera itself was the center of attention.

The footage, which did not exceed seventeen metres, could present one small scene of some kind, eg. *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*.¹ For a long time the basic place in film repertoire was occupied by 'scenic' pictures – like a series of moving postcards. This was a primitive stage with domestic scenes and landscapes (incidentally, the 'photogenic' quality of water was noted). Soon comic tableaux, which played a large role in the realisation

8 of film as an art, were added to these original genres. Owing to the very essence of the comic – the avoidance of complex motivations and complications of story-line; and the gravitation toward material from ordinary, everyday life – these tableaux also created the primary basis for future cinematic techniques and elaborated a series of typical patterns essential to film grammar. But the moving photograph was still the central and in fact the only principle.

As a matter of fact, the invention of the motion-picture camera breathed new life into photography itself, a field previously very limited. Still photography, despite all its efforts to become 'artistic', could not occupy an independent position among the arts inasmuch as it was static and consequently merely 'representational'. Like the graphic arts which allow the artist the freedom to realise various concepts, photography appeared as something subsidiary, purely technical, not possessing qualities of 'style'. Therefore it was taken over into conventional, everyday use, and had no further prospects. The motion-picture camera made the photograph dynamic, transforming it from a closed, static unit into a frame, the most minute portion of a moving current. Now for the first time it became possible for this art, 'representational' in nature, to be displayed in time; and this occurred without competition, classification or analogy. Associating through its various elements with theatre, graphics, music and literature, film art was also something entirely different. The mechanical methods of photography (chiaroscuro, shooting out of focus, size of shot, and so forth) became the methods of a special filmic language and took on new significance. Together with the development of cinematic technique and the realisation of the various potentialities of montage came the necessary distinction between the material itself and the way it was used – its construction – which is characteristic of every art. In other words, the problem of form appeared.

In comparison to film, the field of still photography was relegated to the position of an elementary, everyday, applied art. The relationship between still photography and film is something like the relationship between practical and poetic language. The motion picture camera made possible the discovery and use of certain effects that still photography could not and would not utilise. Then came the problem of 'photogenic' qualities (Louis Delluc), the chief significance of which lies in the introduction into the field of cinematography of the principle of selection of material according to specific criteria.

Art draws on those aspects of everyday life which have no practical application. Everyday automatism of language use leaves masses of phonetic, semantic and syntactic nuances unexploited – and these find a place for themselves in verbal art (Victor Shklovsky). Dancing is constructed of movements not used in ordinary

walking. If art uses everyday life, then it uses it merely as material, to which it gives an unexpected interpretation or a new arrangement in some blatantly deformed or 'grotesque' aspect. This is the immutable 'conventionality' of art which even the most excessive and consistent 'naturalists' cannot avoid if they are to remain artists.

The primary nature of art is the impulse to give an outlet to those energies of the human organism which are excluded from everyday life or which function only partially within it. This is its biological basis, informing it with the force of life's demands – demands which seek satisfaction. This basis, in essence playful and not connected with definite, logical 'thought', is embodied in those 'trans-sense', 'self-orientated' tendencies which are transparent in every art form and are its organic ferment. By transforming this ferment into 'expression' art comes into being as a social phenomenon, a special form of language. These 'self-orientated' tendencies are often laid bare and become revolutionary catch-words – innovators then begin to speak of 'trans-sense poetry', 'absolute music', and so forth. The constant disparity between the 'trans-sense' and language – such is the internal antinomy of art, regulating its evolution.

Film became an art form when the significance of these two qualities became apparent in it. *Photogeny* is the unconscious, 'trans-sense' essence of film, analogues, in this sense, to musical, verbal, pictorial, motor and other types of trans-sensality. We observe it on the screen – in faces, in objects, in scenery – apart from any connection with plot. We see things anew and perceive them as unfamiliar. Delluc notes that 'a locomotive, an ocean liner, an airplane, and a railroad, by the very nature of their structure, are photogenic. Every time frames from a cinema of fact flash on the screen showing us a fleet or a ship in movement, the viewer cries with delight.'² What is important, of course, is not the 'structure' of the object, but rather its presentation on the screen. Any object can be photogenic – it is a question of method and style. The cameraman is the artist of photogeny. Used as 'expressivity', photogeny turns into the 'language' of mimicry, gesture, objects, angles, camera position, and so forth, which form the basis of film stylistics.

II

The demand for a new popular art has long been evident – an art whose specific artistic views would be intelligible to the masses, especially the urban masses who do not have their own 'folklore'. This art, as one directed to the masses, had to appear in the category of a new 'primitive', set in revolutionary opposition to the refined forms of the older arts which live a life apart. This 'primitiveness' was realised on the basis of an invention which thrust forward a new artistic element and used it as the

10 structural dominanta, thus making possible a special form of the syncretisation of separate arts.

The evolution of an art taken as a whole is expressed in constant oscillation between differentiation and syncretisation. Each separate art lives and develops against a background of other arts – both as a particular aspect and as variation. At various times a particular art strives to become popular at which point it tends to assimilate elements from other arts. Differentiation and syncretisation are constant and equally significant processes in the history of art which develop correlatively. Syncretic forms are not at all the exclusive property of the art of savages or 'the people' as was previously thought; for the tendency toward the construction of these forms is a constant fact of artistic culture. The musical dramas of Wagner and the symphonic dances of ballet innovators represent separate manifestations of modern syncretic tendencies. These efforts lacked the spirit of revolutionary 'primitiveness' which is necessary in order that a new form has the significance of a popular art which is able to compete with others specifically through its broader influence. The general cultural change, which in many respects takes us back to the principles of the early middle ages, created a strong demand for a new art free of traditions, primitive in its 'linguistic' (semantic) methods, and large in its potential for influencing the masses. Insofar as technology makes a distinct impact on contemporary culture this art had to be born from the very womb of technology itself.

In its first stage, film was just such an art. It is characteristic that in its early years (ie, right up to the European war), film was considered a vulgar, 'low' art form, fit only for the uncultured. It made its first inroads in the provinces and the outskirts of the big cities. Seduced by an advertisement, an intellectual would enter the cinema and feel awkward at meeting another intellectual: 'So you too were taken in?' would flash into the mind of each. Who would have believed then that the huge auditorium of the Leningrad Conservatoire would house a movie theatre? Such is the usual progression in the evolution of distinct genres and of the arts in general.

Compared to other arts, film appeared somehow primitive, almost vulgar – an insult to sensitive taste. The very fact of creating a new art on the basis of photography violated the traditional 'elevated' concept of creativity. The motion-picture camera stood in cynical opposition to the imagined 'artisanal' character of the older arts and made them, especially theatre, appear rather archaic. A bold novice had found a foothold among the tradition-bound arts and threatened to turn art into simple technology. A film presentation is a kind of all-round diminution of the theatrical spectacle, beginning with a viewer clad in an overcoat who has come in as if by accident, and ending with an empty screen instead

of a curtain and stage. Mechanical reproduction, mechanical repetition (two or three showings an evening), factory production and so on. . . . It is most natural that the intelligentsia, living as a rule by the traditions of an older artistic culture, at first ignored film as mechanical primitiveness, capable of satisfying only 'the street'.

It is clear that the war and revolution quickened the process of spreading film among the masses. Under different historical circumstances, cinema would most likely have had to sustain a much more prolonged and complex struggle. Curiously enough, we may note that even before the war, during the wane of symbolism, theatre professionals were attracted by the idea of a '*sobornost*' in theatrical performance.³ The term '*sobornost*' used by a number of Russian religious thinkers was taken up by symbolists to express a particular kind of spiritual communication between the artist and the audience. For symbolists moral and social justification of art lay in the artist's ability to transcend his individual consciousness and identify his personal will with the divine will of God. This enables him to transfer his individual self-expression into 'a universal experience', to express the 'soul of the people'. The communication thus achieved is not a monologue or even a dialogue but some form of participation in a common activity, 'recollection of a common past': 'Like an electric spark, the word is possible only in a conjunction of the opposite poles of the one creativity: the artist and the people' (Vyacheslav Ivanov, *The Poet and the Crowd*, St Petersburg 1909). An impoverishment was sensed in the life of the theatre; attempts were made to overcome this with experiments aimed at a subtle resurrection of the 'ancient theatre', *commedia dell'arte*, and so forth. Together with the idea of '*sobornost*' appeared the idea of 'theatre for theatre's sake' (N Evreinov), a delicate paradox giving witness to the crisis of theatrical art; and theatrical parody flowed in a broad stream.⁴ In the meantime, an increasing coolness toward theatre became more and more evident, not only among audiences but also among actors.

Dreams of '*sobornost*' did not materialise, but remained a characteristic historical sign of the epoch marking the decline of the theatre. Then, unexpectedly, a new, popular, and special form of '*sobornyy*' art appeared. Moreover, it turned out to be *sobornyy* not only with regard to the viewers ('the street'), but also with respect to production itself. As a syncretic form and as a technical invention, film attracted numbers of diverse specialists; and for a long time films appeared without any names, without 'authorship' – the result of a whole collective's united efforts.

However, there is a great difference between this '*sobornost*' and that which the symbolists dreamed about; this is *sobornost* turned inside out. Even the very concept of 'mass art' demands, with regard to film, a whole series of reservations. We who have

12 witnessed the 'birth of film' are inclined to romanticise somewhat. But if we compel ourselves to consider it soberly, then the mass nature of cinema is not a qualitative, but a quantitative concept — unconnected with its essence. This is a characteristic of the success of film as a purely social phenomenon which is conditioned by a whole series of historical circumstances unconnected with cinema *per se*. Unlike a stage production, a film presentation does not at all require the presence of a mass of people. Anyone having the proper apparatus can watch a film at home, without even going to the cinema. Moreover, sitting in the cinema we do not essentially feel that we are members of a crowd participating in a mass viewing; on the contrary, the conditions of a film presentation tend to make the viewer feel as if he were in complete isolation; and this feeling is one of the specific psychological charms of film perception. A film does not even expect applause from us: there is no one to applaud other than the projectionist. The viewer's condition is close to isolated, intimate contemplation — it is as if he were observing someone's dream. The smallest extraneous sound unrelated to the film irritates him much more than at the theatre. The conversation of other viewers (reading aloud of intertitles, for example) hinders him from concentrating on the film's movement. His ideal is not to feel the presence of others; it is to be alone with the film, to become deaf and dumb.

Despite its popular nature, it seems that film is most capable of being a chamber art. Of course, several film genres, by their very character, are intended for a large audience; but one must not ascribe this particularity of certain genres to cinema as a whole. It is important to keep in mind that the 'mass' period of film, when film struggled for its place among the other arts and consolidated its socio-economic position, is already receding into the past. Today's motion pictures appear as the outcome of artistic experimentation and therefore are not orientated towards a mass audience. Cinema already has a certain history, artistic as well as commercial; a history of styles and schools. Meanwhile the film viewer has already achieved a certain consistency of taste, and has grown used to patterns from which he is loath to depart. This results in that complex relationship of antinomies which is characteristic of every art. As a film for mass audiences *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* was a failure throughout all of Europe; yet in the history of the cinema it was a very important achievement, and its influence on a whole series of subsequent films is considerable. *Our Hospitality*, with Buster Keaton, which presented anew the problem of the comic in film (the juxtaposition of tragic situation and the hero's comic behaviour), turned out to be too intellectual, too complex in conception, to provoke the audience's complete delight. The much more elementary comedy of *The Coward* of course comes across more easily. It is very possible

that the mad commercial success of film, which has left an imprint on the whole history of its 'golden childhood', is already on the verge of crisis; cinema is entering its adolescence, a much more difficult, but also more promising, period. Only in this hope is it worthwhile to present the complex theoretical questions which I will attempt to outline in this article.

13

III

In its present stage, film represents a new syncretic form of art. The invention of the motion-picture camera made possible the elimination of the basic dominanta of theatrical syncretism – *the audible word* – and its substitution by another dominanta – *visible movement in details*. Thus the theatrical system, tied to the audible word, was turned on its head. The film viewer finds himself in completely new conditions of perception which are opposite to those of the reading process: from the subject – visible movement – he progresses to comprehension of it, the construction of internal speech. The success of film is in part connected with this new type of mental labour which does not normally develop in everyday life. With respect to art one may say that our epoch is least of all a verbal one. As a sign of the times film culture stands in opposition to the culture of the word, literary and theatrical, which reigned supreme in the last century. The film viewer seeks relief from the word; he wishes only to see and divine.

However, it would be incorrect to call film a 'mute' art; muteness is not important here, but rather the absence of the *audible word*, and a new interrelationship between word and object. A theatrical interrelationship, in which mimicry and gesture accompany the word, is precluded; but the word maintains its function as articulated mimicry. The film actor speaks during shooting, and this has its effect on the screen. The film viewer actually becomes a sort of deaf-mute (we shall talk about music later), but this does not destroy the role of the word; it merely translates it onto another plane. For example, during a showing at an English cinema, a group of deaf-mutes announced their displeasure at the content of the phrases uttered by the actors – phrases which did not at all correspond to the scenes being depicted on the screen. It turns out that, for deaf-mutes, film is much more of a 'verbal' art than the theatre where, because of the distance between stage and audience, they cannot see clearly the movement of speech organs. Of course, the ordinary filmgoer does not catch articulation as such, but it has significance for him as long as actors do not conduct themselves on the screen like deaf-mutes, and do not play pantomime. The elaboration of articulated mimicry on the screen is the problem for future consideration, in any case it should not be a passive leftover of the shooting.

Still more important is the process of the viewer's *internal*

- 14 *speech*. For the study of the laws of film (especially of montage) it is most important to admit that perception and understanding of a motion-picture is inextricably bound up with the development of internal speech, which makes the connection between separate shots. Outside this process only the 'trans-sense' elements of film can be perceived. The film viewer must perform the complex mental labour of connecting the frames (construction of film-phrases and film-periods), a form of labour practically non-existent in everyday life where the word covers and eliminates all other means of expression. He must continually form a chain of film-phrases, or else he will not understand anything. It is not surprising that there are people for whom such mental labour is difficult, exhausting, unusual and unpleasant. One of the chief concerns of the director is to make sure that the shot is 'accessible' to the viewer; in other words, that the viewer is able to divine the episode's meaning, that he is able to translate it into the language of his own internal speech. Thus, internal speech must be taken into consideration in the very construction of a film.

Cinema demands of the viewer a certain special technique for divination, and this technique will of course become more complex as the art of film-making develops. Directors already make frequent use of symbols and metaphors, the meaning of which depends directly on current verbal metaphors. Film viewing is accompanied by a continual process of internal speech. We have already grown accustomed to a whole series of typical patterns of film-language; the smallest innovation in this sphere strikes us no less forcibly than the appearance of a new word in language. To treat film as an absolutely non-verbal art is impossible. Those who defend cinema from the imitation of literature often forget that though the audible word is eliminated from film, the thought, ie, internal speech, is nevertheless present. The study of the particularities of this film-speech is one of the most important problems in cinematic theory.

The question of intertitles is connected with that of internal speech. The intertitle is one of the essential accents of meaning in a film, but it is impossible to speak of intertitles in general. One must differentiate their types and functions in a given film. Most unpleasant and alien are intertitles of a narrative character, literary intertitles which are explanatory rather than complementary. They are a *substitute* for what should be shown, and divined by the viewer according to the essence of film art. They therefore indicate the failure of the scenario, or the insufficiency of the director's cinematographic creativity. Such intertitles interrupt not only the movement of the film on the screen, but also the flow of internal speech, thus forcing the viewer to turn into a temporary reader and *remember* what the 'author' informs him in words. Quite another thing are *dialogic* intertitles composed with regard

to the particularities of cinema and inserted at the proper time. Short captions, which appear at moments when dialogue is taking place on the screen and which accompany distinct and characteristic gestures of the actors, are perceived as an absolutely natural element of a film. These are not substituted for what could be done differently and do not disrupt film-perception, if they are done in conformity with the laws of cinema (the very graphics of the intertitles play an important role here). Since dialogue must be accessible to the viewer, the help of intertitles is essential. Dialogic intertitles do not fill a plot vacuum and do not inject a narrating 'author' into the film, but merely complement and accent what the viewer sees on the screen.

Experience indicates that comic films have greater need of dialogic intertitles than other types of film, and that these intertitles sometimes significantly enhance the comic effect. One need only recall the captions in *Jewish Luck*, *The Mark of Zorro* ('Have you ever seen anything like it?'), *The Coward* ('Sit down!'). This is so because comedy in general is an artistic phenomenon directed towards the intellect and closely connected with the word. A comic film is usually structured on the details of separate situations, but these details can 'reach' the viewer only by means of intertitles.

In any case, since cinema is not an aspect of pantomime, and the word is not altogether eliminated from it, intertitles are an absolutely legitimate part of a film; and the important thing is simply that they do not turn into literature but take their place in a film as a natural and cinematographically realised element.

The question of music is connected on the one hand with the problem of film-perception and on the other hand with the elimination of the audible word. This question is still unexplored theoretically, while in practice it is obvious. A substitute had to be found for the eliminated audible word, and music was the equivalent to certain aspects of the word. Music takes on the role of emotional intensifier and accompanies the process of internal speech. But this still does not resolve the question of the function of music in cinema and the possible relationship between a film and its musical illustration. What should or could be the principles of this illustration?

In France the idea of the 'musical film' is very popular; L Moussinac, for example, writes about it with great enthusiasm but without sufficient definiteness: 'Light phrases should merge with melodic phrases; rhythms should harmonise, penetrate and mutually complement each other with the greatest exactitude and simultaneity'.⁵ Alongside this rhetorical sentence one might cite the words of Bela Balasz, who is inclined to quite a different solution:

* It is characteristic that we immediately notice the absence of

- 16 music whereas we pay no attention to its presence. Any music turns out to be appropriate to any scene. . . . For music arouses quite different visions which merely interfere with those on the screen when they are too close to them.’⁸

Balasz has more serious hopes for the opposite combination – the creation of films accompanying musical works.

Balasz’s observation is very subtle and correct. A good film so captures our attention that we hardly notice the music; at the same time, a film without musical accompaniment seems impoverished. What is this – habit, or a demand connected with the nature of cinema itself? It seems to me that this question is resolved in connection with what I said about the intimacy of film-perception, about the contemplation of a film as a dream. These particularities of perception demand that a film be enshrouded with a particular emotionally-conditioned atmosphere, which may be as unnoticeable as the air – but is just as necessary. The internal speech of the film viewer is much more flowing and indefinite than uttered speech; music aids the realisation of internal speech without disturbing this flow. The intimate process of forming internal speech combines with musical interpretation to form a sort of unity. It should also be noted that music aids to a certain extent in the translation of screen-aroused emotions into specifically artistic emotions; a film without music sometimes produces a terrifying impression. Thus one may assert that the musical accompaniment of a film *makes easier* the process of forming internal speech, and therefore is not sensed as an independent element.

There is one more aspect of this complex problem that is still unclear – the question of filmic rhythm and its correspondence or relationship to musical rhythm. People who enjoy speaking of the ‘rhythm’ of frames or montage frequently play with metaphor or use the word ‘rhythm’ in the same general and not very fruitful sense in which they speak of rhythm in architecture, painting, and so forth. In contemporary cinema we do not have rhythm in the precise meaning, as we do in music, dancing or poetry, but rather we have a certain general rhythmical pace which bears no relationship to music in film. To a certain extent the length of the shots can serve as a basis for the construction of film-rhythm; but this is a matter for the future and is difficult to discuss right now. It is possible that in the future evolution of cinema (when it passes from adolescence to youth) its rhythmical potentialities will be more clearly manifest. Then particular rhythmic genres may be defined, as orientated not around the story-line, but around photogeny. It is possible that this form, analogous to poetry, will be born out of the experiments with films illustrating musical works. Then the question of music in film will be more clearly defined. In the meantime its role is typical precisely for film’s

IV

So cinema has become defined as the art of photogeny, an art which uses the language of movement (facial expressions, gestures, and poses). On this ground it entered into competition with the theatre . . . and was victorious. Significant in this conquest was the fact that the film viewer could see the details of facial expressions, of objects, and so forth, and could be transported from place to place with an easy thrust of the imagination, seeing before him people and objects at various distances, angles, and in different lighting conditions. Film dynamics, developing on the screen, conquered the theatre and transformed it into a kind of 'sweet antiquity'. The theatre must realise itself anew – not as a syncretic form, but as a distinct art in which the word and body of the actor must be freed from everything else.

One of the basic disadvantages of theatre as a syncretic art – a disadvantage, given the conditions of a theatrical performance, which can only be overcome to a limited extent – was the immobility of the stage and hence the fixity of distance and point of view. The visual effects of a theatrical presentation, such as mimicry, gestures, decorations, objects, are inevitably confronted by the problem of the *distance* between the immobile stage and the audience. A play with visual details is almost impossible in the theatre; therefore mimicry and gesture are limited in development, and an actor with a particular talent for mimicry is unable to display this talent in the theatre. The very immobility of the stage means that an actor must perform against a background of static decorations; this constrains the dramatist, and introduces something strange, superfluous and static into the verbal dynamics of theatrical art. In the theatre an object plays an absolutely passive role; it appears as an irrelevant witness or spy on the actor, and irritates the viewer by its presence. The division of theatrical space into parts by lighting devices or by the use of a revolving stage does not change anything fundamental, and is perceived as a poor imitation of cinematography. All that is specific to cinema looks crude and heavy in the theatre – like the vain efforts at wit by a dull person. Theatre must, of course, follow a different path; the stage must be transformed into an arena for the exclusive activity of the actor; theatrical space as a defined locus of action must be destroyed. In other words, there must be a return to the principles of the Shakespearian theatre.

Film eliminated this central problem of the stage – its rigidity – and also eliminated the distance between performers and audience. The screen is an imaginary point, and its immovability is also imaginary. The distance between actor and viewer changes constantly – to be more precise, there is *no* distance, but rather

18 variations in scale and plane. An actor's face can be shown in hyperbolic dimensions in which the tiniest muscular contractions are visible; the viewer – if necessary in the course of the film – sees the most minute details of gesture, costume and furniture. Nothing simply stands and waits its turn; the settings and points of view (oblique angle, high angle, etc) both change. These technical possibilities have made film a competitor not only of theatre, but also of literature. Before the discovery of film and the conception of montage, literature was the only art capable of unfolding complex plot structures, developing story parallels, freely changing the locus of action, exposing details, and so forth. Now, with the advent of cinema, many of these advantages are no longer the sole property of literature. Film dynamics turned out to be quite powerful in these areas. Like theatre, literature enriched cinema and assisted in its development. At the same time it lost its previous pre-eminent position and therefore must acknowledge the presence of a new art in its own future evolution.

If one is to consider also the link between film and the representational arts (a subject that requires a special study), then it seems justified to characterise contemporary cinema as a syncretic form. In one way or another film has touched the system of the older, isolated arts and even while departing from them has had a decisive influence on their future evolution. We are faced with a new fact: photogeny and montage have created the potential for such dynamics of visual images as are impossible in any other art. These dynamics, of which the perspectives are still far from settled, have for the time being forced the other arts to cluster around and serve a new focal point. Various styles of film have begun to emerge depending on the method of organising the material, on 'inclination'. Actual film styles are just being noted; and theory has hardly touched this question.

It is customary to speak of the 'realism' of cinema and to consider this its special advantage. This opinion, in its primitive categorical form, is of course, naive, and it must be discarded because it obscures the specific laws of film as an art form. It is completely understandable that in its earliest stage, when even the 'linguistic' means of film had yet to be defined, film was not conscious of its artistic potentialities and concerned itself exclusively with creating illusion and imitating 'nature'. Then, together with the development of the motion-picture camera as an instrument, the 'naturalistic' mid-shot – which had still not broken with the principles of pure photography – lost its original significance. Film began to develop its own conventions, which are far from primitive naturalism, such as close-ups, dolly-in shots, angles, and so forth.

The principle of photogeny defined the basic essence of film as absolutely specific and conventional. After that the *deformation of nature* occupied its natural place in cinema as in the other

arts. In the hands of a cameraman, the camera functions as paint does in the hands of an artist. One and the same nature scene, taken from different perspectives, at different distances and in different lighting conditions, gives different stylistic effects. Shots from nature are more and more frequently replaced by shots from the film studio – precisely because nature interferes with maintaining a defined stylistic tone in a film. Directors are concerned not only with the composition of a film (montage), but also with the composition of individual frames, utilising the principles of symmetry, proportion, the disposition of light, acquisition of space, and so on. Once we talk about the style of a film and the composition of frames, it is clear that realism, so much talked about, represents only one style which is no less conventional than any other. The demands for the creation of ‘types’ (*tipazh*) which raised the problem of the film actor (actor versus ‘nature’) have come about not because film is realistic, but because of the conditions of film projection: close-ups, and the particularities of photogeny do not allow the use of make-up to the extent that it is used in the theatre. Because of this the principles of film acting are absolutely different from acting in the theatre.

And so, realism is no less conventional in film than it is in literature or theatre. It is true that cinema can introduce actual nature into a motion picture – something which theatre, for example, cannot do. A film director can have his own kind of ‘notebook’ in which he accumulates various scenes from life in order to use them in the montage of some motion picture (eg, in a film of the ‘physiological’ type); but like a writer, he can do this only on the condition that he subordinate this material to the overall stylistic mode of the film and its genre conception.

V

The character of shooting (distances, angles, lighting, aperture size, etc) and the type of montage are decisive factors in a film’s style. We typically understand montage simply as ‘plot construction’, when actually its basic role is stylistic. Montage is primarily a system of *arranging* or *coupling* the frames, its own kind of film syntax.

Plot construction *per se* is determined by the scenario or even by the libretto; and if it also depends on montage, then it does so only to the extent that montage gives it one or another stylistic colouring, by providing a motivation for alternation of parallels, by giving one or another tempo, by using close-ups, and so forth. Film has its own language, that is, it has its own stylistics and techniques of phraseology. I use these terms, of course, not in order to bring cinema close to literature, but rather in the same reasonable analogy which allows one, for example, to speak of a ‘musical phrase’, ‘musical syntax’, etc. The phenomenon of internal speech, a characteristic of film perception, gives me the

20 full right to use this terminology without violating the particularities of cinema.

S Timoshenko⁷ has attempted to 'enumerate' and 'describe' the basic devices of montage. But before enumerating and describing (if this is even possible in general form), one must construct a theory of montage, and this is exactly what is lacking in Timoshenko's book. First of all, in the fifteen examples cited by Timoshenko, purely stylistic devices such as the 'device of contrast' are lumped together with devices that have a different function; and secondly, montage as such – the question of the principles and devices of frame arrangement – is completely bypassed. For example, 'change of locale' is not a device at all *per se*, and is not montage; it is a technical possibility afforded by the motion-picture camera and the screen, just as 'change of angle' or 'change of distance'. Montage is the technique of *using* this possibility, the variants of which depend both on the genre of a given film and on the stylistic manner of the director. *How* does one show the transition from one place to another, from one parallel to another? This is the basic problem of montage when a change of locale is demanded by a film's plot movement. It is a problem of stylistics (logic) and motivation. We see change of locale in any film; but one director is distinguished from another precisely by his *montage* of this transition, by the devices he uses for its preparation and elaboration.

A film's movement is structured on the principle of temporal and spatial coupling. The dynamics of film, which grant the director the right freely to mix place, focus and angles, and to change the tempo, at the same time make their own demands which in such aspect exist in neither literature nor theatre – demands of temporal and spatial continuity. This is the particularity of cinema which Balasz appropriately calls *visuelle Kontinuität* (visual continuity). With respect to films made on the basis of literary works, Balasz notes that there is always something lifeless, something fragmentary in them:

'A story conceived in verbal form skips over many features which it is impossible to skip over in a film. The word, the concept, and the thought all exist outside of time. A picture has the concrete force of the present and lives only in it. . . . Therefore a film, particularly in the depiction of spiritual movement, demands the complete continuity of separate features.'

Here the director is confronted with a 'resistance of material' which he must somehow overcome: film demands montage so that the viewer, even if only within the limits of separate segments, may be conscious of the *sense of time*, ie, of the continuous sequence of episodes. What is important is not 'unity of time' as it was understood in the theatre, but that the temporal relationships of separate moments be sensed. Every such moment can be

abbreviated or lengthened as much as desired (one of the basic tempo effects of montage), but what follows must bear some temporal relationship to what has come before. In this area film possesses extremely rich structural potentialities. What is important is that contiguous frames of a film are perceived as what *precedes* and what *follows*. This is the general law of cinema. The director, submitting to this law, makes use of it for the construction of time; ie, he creates the illusion of continuity. 21

If a character leaves his house it is impossible, in the following frame, to show him entering another building; for this contradicts both time and space. Thus the necessity for so-called bridges which, in the hands of an inexperienced superdirector, usually weigh down a film because they introduce superfluous, and therefore irrelevant, details. It is precisely at these points that keenness and creativity are demanded of the director. It is precisely here that the art of montage is revealed; to use the *necessity*, dictated by the nature of the material, as a stylistic *device* (which deceives the viewer and conceals from him the power of the 'law').

Of course, as in any art, all these 'prohibitions' are relative and at any moment can become 'possibilities'. But this can be done only under definite conditions of style and genre. One can violate a law in art, but cannot simply evade it. If there is no positive motivation, then there must be a negative one.

And so from this point we proceed to a concept of montage as film stylistics. The reality and significance of this problem are substantiated, it seems to me, by what I said about the internal speech of the film viewer, and about the laws of frame arrangement (visual continuity and the logic of coupling). By avoiding questions on the principles of montage, Timoshenko deprives himself of the possibility of assessing the devices in such a way that they do not become intermingled. The 'device of contrast' is a particular instance of motivating change of locale; in other words, it is one montage device which has a purely stylistic character. Here is an example from the author's own book:

'A wealthy American sits down in a comfortable chair, following a sumptuous meal. The next take shows a prison. A criminal – a worker from the rich man's factory – sits down in an electric chair. The rich man presses a button and a brilliant chandelier lights up. In the prison a button is also pushed and a shock flows through the body of the worker.'

In Timoshenko's system this is simultaneously a 'device of place change' and a 'device of contrast'; and both are related to 'plot composition'. But actually this device is either the motivation for change of place (if demanded by the plot) or the use of contrast for ideological goals – a kind of oratorical device of comparison. The fact of the matter is that the meaning of a device depends on its function.

It should also be noted that what I said above about temporal sequence is not contradicted by a montage which is constructed on the principle of the *simultaneity* of episodes. This simultaneity is not the same as that which we have in literature when the author, moving from one group of characters to another, says, 'At the same time as . . .'. In literature time plays the absolutely conventional role of linking: it is merely noted, and the author may deal with it as he wishes wherever he is the narrator. In film, simultaneity constitutes the same sequence, only introduced by the method of intersecting parallels (I say this in deliberate contradiction to the Euclidean concept of parallels). One sequence is interrupted and is continued on the basis of other material. This allows not only the possibility of creating the illusion of continuity, but also the unique structuring of time itself – and all the more since it is connected with space. As for tempo, I will return below to this question, in the chapter on the film-period.

Now I should like to take up the question of film stylistics in the narrow sense of the word, ie, the questions of film syntax (the concept of the film phrase, the montage of the film period) and film semantics (the perceptual signals of film such as metaphor). These questions of course demand special study done on the basis of given films; I limit myself here almost completely to the presentation of the questions.

VI

Any art which is perceived in time must possess a certain articulateness, since it is, to some degree, 'language'. Beginning with the smallest parts which comprise the nature of the material itself, one proceeds to the articulation, which represents defined structural portions that are actually perceivable. Thus, a foot in a poem is a mechanical, abstract articulation, even though it undoubtedly participates in the structuring of the poem. What is perceived is not the foot as such, but rather groups of elements which are united and distinguished by rhythmic accents.

In film one must distinguish between the *film strip* and its *projection on the screen*. The former represents the ideal mechanical dismemberment. It consists of squares (frames), each $1/52$ meter in size; such a frame taken separately is the smallest part of a single movement which in nature is continual, indivisible. This is a mechanical and abstract (in the sense that it is not perceivable on the screen) dismemberment, and not articulateness. It is the technical basis of cinema without which it could not exist.

As any art, film lives and develops on the basis of its own artificially-created, conventional and, in a sense, *derivative* character, which comes into being as a result of turning nature into material. Artificially diffused into abstract units, movement is placed anew on the screen before the eyes of the viewer – but

in its own way, according to the laws of cinema. Film was created out of the two potentialities comprising its own derivative nature: the technical (the nature of the motion-picture camera) and the psycho-physiological (the nature of human vision). The former dismembers and interrupts what in actuality is continual; the latter, in a new way, informs the movement of separate shots with the illusion of continuity.

Thus the frames exist separately on the strip only in order that separateness be done away with on the screen, in order to blend into a single movement. In other words, the frame is, for the viewer, an imagined, abstract articulation – in a sense, the atom of a film.

As a result, there is ambivalence in the very term 'frame' as used by film-makers; the frame which exists separately only on the film strip; and the montage frame (shot) which Timoshenko defines as 'a discrete piece of film, from splice to splice, taken with fixed lens from a single angle and camera position'.

When discussing the articulateness of film speech, it is obviously not the photograph or taped frames, but rather the montage frames (shots) – since only the latter are perceived as real units – which have primary significance. It is precisely these frames which, connected with contiguous ones, form the system of frame arrangement which is the basic problem of film-stylistics. In this system one must, of course, distinguish lesser and greater articulations with reference to the formation of the viewer's internal speech. Insofar as its principle is the formation of semantic units and their coupling, montage is precisely montage and not simply a splicing together of disparate pieces. The basic unit of this coupling is the film-phrase.

If by 'phrase' we understand a certain basic articulation, actually perceivable as a segment of moving material (verbal, musical, etc), then phrase can be defined as a group of elements gathered around an accentual nucleus. A musical phrase, for example, is formed by grouping tones around a rhythmic-melodic or harmonic accent, for which the previous movement is a preparation. In cinema an analogous role is played by the grouping of various camera positions and angles.

In cinema we have three basic movements on the screen: motion *past* the viewer, motion *toward* him and motion *away*. The first of these, which can be called panoramic, is elementary movement, uncharacteristic of film. It predominated in the earliest stages of cinematography ('scenic' pictures) when everything was shown in mid-shot, without montage; and when film was still merely a moving photograph not far beyond the magic lantern. The transition from raw film stock into 'film' established the significance of montage, not only as plot form but also as stylistic form (frame arrangement). The creation of film-speech with its particular semantics demanded the creation of accentual features by means

of which film-phrases are planned. In the same way the stylistic significance of camera position and angle was made clear.

Purely technical methods of photography were realised as methods of articulation in film-speech. The mid-shot was preserved only as an orientating element of film-phrase, as a unique brand of 'circumstances of place or time', according to old grammatical terminology. Accentual members of a phrase are created by the medium close-up, which is a special kind of subject and predicate in a film-phrase. *The change of camera positions*, from medium shot to medium close-up and then to close-up; or in some other order, with the close-up as the basic stylistic accent – this is the basic law on which a film phrase is constructed. (Departures, of course, are as possible here as from any 'law' in any art.) To this is joined the change of angles (a kind of subordinate clause) which introduces complementary accents into the scheme of a film phrase. A scene is given in medium shot, then in medium close-up; then the same shot is given from different angles (high angle, low angle), etc.

Is it possible at this time to note any particular types of film phrases? In order to do this, of course, a much more detailed elaboration of the question is necessary, using laboratory methods to examine the separate frames. Abstract classification would hardly be fruitful, but it is possible to say something on the subject. For the film viewer the difference between a long and a short film phrase is a very real thing. The montage of a film phrase can be either lengthened or abbreviated. In certain cases the mid-shot may have the most significance – its stretching gives the impression of a long, slowly developing phrase. In other cases, however, a phrase may consist of rapidly alternating mid-close-ups and close-ups which produce an impression of abruptness, brevity. Besides this, the essential distinction in the stylistic construction of a film phrase depends on the movement of camera positions from details shown in close-up, to panorama, or vice versa. In the first instance what results is something like enumeration which leads to a sum. The viewer, without knowing the whole, examines the details, grasping at first only their visual image and objective meaning: eg, a high fence, a huge castle, a dog on a chain. Then a panorama opens up . . . and he understands: it is the court yard of a bleak patriarchal merchant home. This is a type of phrase in which the viewer must interpret the details *after* the mid-shot, and must then return to them. In other words, this is a *regressive* type of film phrase. Its special feature is not only the order of camera positions but also that the details must be charged with a particular semantic symbolism, the meaning of which is divined by the viewer before the concluding accent. The montage of such a phrase is constructed like a riddle. Another type of film phrase – the *progressive* type – proceeds from mid-shot to details so that, in a sense, the viewer himself gradually draws nearer the picture and

with each frame is more orientated to the events occurring on the screen. One may say further that the first type of film phrase is closer to the descriptive mode, whereas the second is closer to the narrative. Naturally these types of film phrase are given with particular clarity and sequence, especially in the beginning of a film when it is necessary to thrust the viewer into the very atmosphere of the picture. Thus a film phrase is created by a grouping of montage frames on the basis of the movement of camera positions and angles, which is united by accentual features. The stylistic variation of film phrases depends on the devices of montage.

VII

From the film phrase we proceed to a consideration of phrase coupling, ie, the construction of the film-period. Once begun, the movement of frames demands semantic coupling on the principle of time-space continuity. I am, of course, speaking of the *illusion* of continuity, ie, of the fact that on the screen the movement of space and time must be *constructed*, because the viewer must feel it. Time-space relationships in film play the role of a basic semantic link, outside of which the viewer cannot orient himself with respect to the movement of frames.

In theatre this problem has a completely different significance due to the single, static character of its time and space. In this respect, theatre is much more 'naturalistic' than film. In the theatre time is passive – it simply corresponds to the actual time of the audience. The dramatist can, of course, speed up the tempo of the action or write into a given act a much greater number of events than is possible in reality, but this can be done only insofar as the viewer, just as a reader, forgets about time and is indifferent to motivation. Theatre cannot give *conventional* continuity; time in theatre is filled up but is not constructed. If a character has to write a letter, then he can do nothing other than write it before the audience. Parallelism in action, which the film-director uses in constructing filmic time, is only partially possible in the theatre and its function is quite different. Unity of time in the theatre is essentially a problem of plot rather than of time, whereas in film the plot can consume any amount of time – a year, many years, a whole lifetime. The unity of time in film, however, as a problem of montage (temporal continuity of separate parts), is a problem specifically of the construction of time.

In cinema, time is not filled up, but constructed. By interrupting scenes and changing camera positions and angles, the director can retard or speed up not only the tempo of the action but also the tempo of the film itself (montage), thus creating an absolutely unique sense of time. The effects of the finales in Griffith's films (*Intolerance*, *Orphans of the Storm*) are well known – the tempo of action slows almost to a standstill, whereas the tempo of montage speeds up and achieves a frenetic rapidity.⁸ Thus we have

26 two types of pace in cinema: the tempo of action and the tempo of montage. The intersection of these two tempos forms that special time which we may call filmic time. The tempos may correspond or they may not. For example, the first part of *Devil's Wheel* is merely exposition, giving part of the story-line (sailors from the *Aurora* go into the People's Building where Shorin meets Valya), and the action develops very slowly; but the montage of the details (American mountains, a wheel) proceeds at a very rapid tempo.

Time in film is inextricably linked with space (Balasz uses the double-barrelled term *Zeitraum*). In theatre when an actor exits from a scene, he also exits from the stage, from the sole theatrical space. The scene is left 'empty' and if the act is not finished, then someone else must replace the departed actor, at least until his return. Because of this, theatrical montage has its characteristic 'coincidences' of exits and entrances – an essential convention. In other words, space is as passive as time in theatre; space as such does not function in the dynamics of a play, but is merely filled up. However space is an integral part of the film viewer's experience, since in cinema space exists apart from the actors. The theatrical actor is tied to the stage and may not abandon it because beyond it is emptiness – a negative space that is nonexistent for the viewer; but the film actor is an entity surrounded by limitless space, in which he moves freely. If he leaves a building, then the viewer should in some way see his movement to another place. In other words, space in cinema has significance not so much for plot as for stylistics (syntax). Thus the necessity for 'passages'. This is not 'naturalism', but the unique logic of film, based on the principle of time-space continuity.

Insofar as we are speaking specifically of the stylistic function of montage, the montage of connecting film-phrases is determined by this principle. The film-period, which can of course vary in length, is perceived as a certain bound portion precisely to the extent that the movement of frames which comprise it is connected with the continuity of time-space relationships. The elaboration of separate time-space features (film phrases) and their linkage is concluded by a certain summing up, which establishes the semantic relationships between the features. When a viewer begins to watch a film, he sees separate pieces; after two or three film-phrases he begins to understand the place of action, the relationships between characters, the meaning of their acts and conversations – but still only partially. Then a moment arrives when the semantic relationships of all the elements comprising the montage material of the segment become clear to him; the film-period is bounded by the intersection of montage frames at a defined point which illumines the mutual connection of preceding segments and concludes their movement. Close-ups play a special role analogous to the musical 'fermato' and usually figure in the capacity of

concluding feature: the flow of time halts, as it were, the film's 'breathing' is constrained . . . and the viewer is lost in contemplation.

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From this general description of the film period it follows that the basic stylistic problem of its montage lies in the motivation of transitions from one film-phrase to another. Wherever it has no relationship to the question of montage tempo and the construction of time-space relationships, plot motivation does not of itself resolve this problem. The stylistic devices of montage consist precisely in how the director arranges the frames, how he joins one plot feature with another. Here we see the difference between a flowing, slow montage which breaks film time up into tiny portions which cling to one another (eg, a single scene based on everyday details, or on the difference of angles); and rapid montage, which can achieve a 'flashing' or 'fragmented' quality when separate instants are presented to the viewer in short footage. This is one side of the art of film-syntax. The other side is expressed in how the director passes from one scene to the next.

The fact is that each scene is presented to the viewer in pieces, segments. There is much that the viewer does not see at all; the intervals between segments are filled up by internal speech. But for this internal speech to be constructed so as to give the viewer the impression of completeness and logic, the segments must proceed in a certain definite relationship and the transitions must be sufficiently motivated. Some films are distorted to such an extent that the montage seems somewhat convulsive; the viewer is unable to form any internal speech, and he understands nothing (an example from last summer's repertoire is *Circus Twins* with Werner Krauss; and earlier *The Joyless Street*, with Asta Nielsen). If a character sets off from one point to another then the director may proceed in different ways, depending on his stylistic concept: he may show us the passage in detail, or he may skip over several moments, substituting for these omissions with material from another episode. Montage in general is constructed of such substitutions – its movement is multilinear. The illusion of time-space continuity is created not with actual continuity, but with its equivalents; for instance while a family is eating, something else is happening in another place. Parallels are utilised on the principle of simultaneity; they intersect in the viewers' internal speech as corresponding in time.

But here the problem of motivation arises. At what point should one sequence be interrupted, and how does one make the transition to another? In other words, with what logical relationship should one connect parallels or segments of a film-period in order to make the necessary transitions stylistically legitimate?

At this point the significance of such devices as contrast, coincidence, and comparison becomes apparent. Variety in this area

28 is infinite, but one or another *association* serves as the general basis. Occasionally, of course, intertitles are used, but usually in those cases when intertitles are least desirable. Selection and use of devices for associating the different parts of a film-period – this is the basic stylistic problem of montage.

VIII

Still to be discussed – again, only in the most general terms – are the fundamental particularities of film-semantics, that is, of those signals by which cinema allows the viewer to understand the meaning of what occurs on the screen. This is the question of how separate features of a film ‘reach’ the viewer.

I have already said that the film viewer must divine a great deal. As any other art, cinema is ultimately a special system of allegory. The chief particularity of film is that it dispenses with the aid of the audible word – what we have is the language of photogeny. The director, the actor and the cameraman face the problem of ‘speaking without words’, and the viewer, that of understanding what is being said. This is the enormous advantage of cinema, and at the same time the source of enormous difficulties, the overcoming of which demands special creativity and special technique.

Filmic language is no less conventional than any other. Film semantics is composed of that body of expressivity, such as mimicry and gesture, which is assimilated by us in everyday usage and is therefore ‘spontaneously’ comprehensible on the screen. But first, this body is too meagre to make a film, while secondly – and this is most important – its meanings are too diverse. In addition, film, as any art, is inclined to cultivate precisely those elements of semantics which are not commonly utilised. Film not only has its own ‘language’ but also its own ‘jargon’ which is little understood by the uninitiated.

A gesture or facial expression taken separately, like a ‘vocabulary’ item taken separately, is polysemic. Tynyanov’s theory of basic and secondary (or fluctuating) signs of meaning, which he developed in analysing poetic semantics, is appropriate here:

‘A word does not have a single defined meaning. It is a chameleon in which at any time there may surface different nuances, and sometimes even different colorations. The abstraction of a “word” is actually a kind of circle, a circle filled differently each time depending on the lexical system in which the word finds itself, and on its particular functions as a speech element. It is, in a sense, a cross-section of these different lexical and functional systems.’⁹

All this is relevant in an examination of film semantics. A separate photographic shot is its own kind of ‘vocabulary’ item, an isolated film-word. The semantics of a snapshot which has no

'context', which stands outside a 'sentence' – hence having no 'lexical plane' – is poor and abstract. The classical 'look at the birdie', with which photographers may forewarn of a shot, is dictated by the absence of a semantic task, the absence of 'context'. The photographic window is a 'dictionary', whereas the window of filmic shots is a collection of quotations. It is interesting to compare the impression of such takes *before* a showing and *after*: in the first case, you can divine only the most general meaning of separate scenes – 'they are kissing', 'someone is following someone else', etc; in the second, the takes come alive, as a quotation from a well-known work comes alive – because you know the picture, you know the 'context'.

From all that has been said one may conclude that in film we have the semantics of *frames* and the semantics of *montage*. The semantics of a frame *per se* occurs infrequently; but certain details in the composition of frames sometimes have an independent semantic meaning. However the basic semantic role belongs to montage, since it is precisely through montage that the frames are coloured with definite shades of meaning. We are familiar with examples of re-edited films in which quite a different meaning has been given to the same frames when they are put in a new 'context'. In just the same way a frame that is part of a documentary can be used in a film, but its meaning will now be completely different, because it will enter into the semantics of montage. The fact is that film is a thoroughly *sequential* art,¹⁰ beginning with prints and ending with montage frames: the meaning of separate frames gradually grows clear from their interrelationship and sequence. The basic signs of their meaning are most unstable by themselves, and are created within any given film as semantic patterns which no longer arrest the attention of the experienced film viewer.

One characteristic of the sequential nature of film is that montage results in intermittent rather than in full sequentiality. Mimicry on the screen, for example, is not at all the same as mimicry on the stage. The mimicry of a theatrical actor accompanies his utterances; the theatrical actor really *mimes* – not just at the main points, but continually. The film actor however is not forced to master the mimetic gamut which is so essential for the theatrical actor to elaborate. In this sense mimicry does not exist in film, but rather there are separate facial expressions, poses and gestures, signalling one or another meaning. For just this reason film mimicry is at the same time both richer and poorer than theatrical mimicry; it functions on quite a different plane, and adheres to quite different laws of expressivity. The mimetic manner of Chaplin or Keaton has a semantic effect only in cinema – in connection with close-ups and other particularities of montage. Stage mimicry is perceived on the screen as 'over-playing', constructed as it is on the principle of a full spectrum

30 of expressions. Film mimicry is much more static because the dynamics are concentrated in montage; in cinema the semantic clarity of facial expressions is important, and typology is important; but 'miming' is not at all important or necessary. Particular instants, stimuli, flash before us on the screen; and they must be recalled as such. But their shades of meaning are revealed through the 'context' of the film, through the semantics of its montage.

One more general question remains, concerning cases when the director must give a semantic commentary to the film in whole or in part, when 'something from the author' must appear in a film over and above the plot itself. The easiest method is to give commentary in intertitles, but contemporary cinema is already making attempts to function by different means. I have in mind the appearance in cinema of metaphor, which sometimes even bears the characteristics of symbol. From the semantic point of view the introduction of metaphor into film is of particular interest because it confirms again the real significance of internal speech, not as an accidental psychological element of film perception, but as an integral structural element of a film. Film metaphor is entirely dependent on verbal metaphor. The viewer can understand it only when he possesses a corresponding metaphoric expression in his own verbal baggage. Of course it is possible that as cinema develops further it will create its own semantic patterns which can serve as a basis for the construction of independent film metaphors, but this will not change anything in principle.

A film metaphor is a kind of visual realisation of a verbal metaphor. It is natural that only current verbal metaphors can serve as material for film metaphors; the viewer quickly grasps them precisely because they are already well known to him and because they are easily recognised as metaphors. For example the word 'fall' is used in language as a metaphor for the road to death; because of this usage, the metaphor in *Devil's Wheel* was possible. In this film the sailor Shorin chances into a tavern and joins a billiard game. His ball *falls* into the pocket. The absolutely episodic quality of this scene gives the viewer to understand that it is significant, not for story-line development, but as commentary: the hero's 'fall' begins. Another example, from *The Cloak*: in the scene between Akakii Akakievich and the 'Very Important Person' the camera-angles change; from low angle when Akakii Akakievich looks at the Very Important Person to high angle when the Very Important Person shouts at Akakii Akakievich. 'Low angle, high angle' are taken here from a verbal metaphor - 'to look down on someone'. The latter example, by the way, gives a glimpse of the broad future that lies ahead for film metaphor, to the extent that it can be constructed on the devices of camera angle, lighting, and so forth.

An extremely interesting aspect of this question is that a verbal

metaphor *per se* does not leave the boundaries of purely verbal semantics if the author has no special tendency to give it a comic meaning. It has been pointed out repeatedly that the development or realisation of a verbal metaphor in literature is primarily a parodistic device (cf, eg, Mayakovsky). A film metaphor is, as it were, a genuine realisation of a verbal metaphor on the screen. How then can it be perceived seriously? Obviously the answer is that in cinema, first of all, we move within the limits of cinematographic, not verbal, motivation; and secondly, the internal speech of the film-viewer, formed on the basis of frames, is not realised as an exact verbal formulation. What results is the opposite relationship: if a verbal metaphor is not realised in the consciousness of the reader to the point of a clear visual image (in other words, if the literal meaning is shielded by the metaphorical), then the film metaphor is not realised in the consciousness of the viewer to the point of a complete verbal statement.

Much more could be said about the conventional semantic signs of film (dissolves, use of filters, printing, etc), the comprehension of which is connected with verbal patterns metaphorised anew, or with patterns of photography and graphics familiar to the viewer. But one must speak of this in detail. Film semantics is a new and complex subject demanding special examination. For the moment I have deemed it important merely to establish the semantic role of montage and emphasise the significance of film metaphor as the use of verbal material on the screen.

Translated by Thomas Aman

Notes

1. G Michel Coissac. *Histoire du cinématographe*. Paris, 1925. Unfortunately, this book does not at all give the history of the cinematograph, but rather is merely an advertisement for French film production.
2. Louis Delluc. *Photogénie*. (Translated by T Sorokin. Moscow: 'Novye vekhi', 1924. The reference is to p 96 of this edition.)
3. See, eg, articles by Sologub, Chertkov, Lunacharsky and others in the symposium *Teatr. Kniga o novom teatre* (*Theatre. A Book on the New Theatre*). St Petersburg: 'Shipovnik', 1908.
4. B V Kazansky. *Metod teatra. Analiz sistemy N N Evreinova* (*A Method of the Theatre: An Analysis of N N Evreinov's System*). Leningrad: 'Academia', 1925.
5. Leon Moussinac. *Rozhdenie kino* (*Naissance du cinéma*, 1924). Translated by S Mokulsky and T Sorokin. Leningrad: 'Academia', 1926, p 50.
6. Béla Balasz. *Der sichtbare Mensch oder die Kultur des Films*. 1924, p 143. (There is a Russian translation.)
7. *Iskusstvo kino i montazh filma* (*The Art of Cinema and the Montage of a Film*). Leningrad: 'Academia', 1926.
8. With respect to this see Balasz and Timoshenko (*ibid*, pp 42-44).
9. See his book *Problema stikhotvornogo yazyka* (*The Problem of Poetic Language*). Leningrad: 1924, p 48 ff.
10. *Ibid*, p 40.

32 **Editorial note**

As far as we have been able to ascertain, the films mentioned in this essay are:

Our Hospitality, director Buster Keaton and Jack Blystone, USA 1923;
Intolerance, director D W Griffith, USA 1916;
Orphans of the Storm, director D W Griffith, USA 1921;
The Mark of Zorro, director Fred Niblo, USA 1920;
The Cloak, director G Kozintsev and L Trauberg, USSR 1926;
The Devil's Wheel, director G Kozintsev and L Trauberg, USSR 1926;
Joyless Street, director G W Pabst, Germany 1925;
Jewish Luck, director A Granovski, USSR 1925;
Circus Twins: possibly G W Pabst's *Secrets of the Soul*, Germany 1926;
The Coward, director Thomas Ince, USA 1915.

It is possible that the latter two titles have been incorrectly identified, as the title under which a foreign film is released often differs radically from the original title.

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Introduction

The name of Osip Brik is frequently mentioned along with the names of his more famous friends and contemporaries, like Mayakovsky, Khlebnikov, and Victor Shklovsky. When referring to Brik, former colleagues are profoundly apologetic for their belated and inadequate recognition: 'I am guilty before many people. I am guilty before Osip Maksimovich Brik because I rarely speak of him with gratitude,' writes Victor Shklovsky.¹

Yet no literary historian has ever attempted to assess his role in the evolution of Russian Futurism, his contribution to Formalism, and his significance in the controversies on the nature of art required by the new society which polarised the Russian literary world of the twenties.

Osip Maksimovich Brik was born in Moscow in 1888. Brik's father was a dealer in coral, his mother a cultivated and well-read woman. As a student Brik ran a course on political economy in Valitskaya's gymnasium for girls. There he met his future wife and life-long friend – Lilya Yurievna K. Brik graduated from the Law Faculty of Moscow University, but never practiced as a lawyer. The only application of his professional training was perhaps his brief period of working in the Cheka² soon after the Revolution. By that time Brik had already established himself as a leading Futurist theorist – Mayakovsky's closest associate – and a prominent Formalist critic of Opoyaz (The Society for the Study of Poetic Language). Since 1918 he had been one of the editors of the Futurist paper *Art of the Commune*, and a member of the Section of Fine Arts of the Commissariat of Enlightenment – IZO Narkompros. It is virtually impossible now to get any information about Brik's work in the Cheka. We know only that he acted as an investigator in cases connected with violations of Soviet law. In itself this fact only attests to Brik's unreserved devotion to, and identification with the Revolution. He joined the Bolshevik party after the October Revolution, but was expelled during the first purge in 1921 on the grounds of his 'unproletarian' origin and never applied for readmission.

Brik's concern with the social role of art gave impetus to his literary and organisational activities in the years following the October Revolution.

* Proletarian revolution demands the radical reorganisation of all

36 forms of cultural life. It cannot be confined to separate reforms or mere popularisation of the existing cultural values.' (From Brik's paper 'The Museum and Proletarian Culture' read at the collegium meeting on February 7, 1919.)³

This principle underlay the incessant search for new artistic forms appropriate to the tasks of social reconstruction, and pointed towards utilitarianism of art and the reinterpretation of artistic values.

Almost all the discoveries and achievements of Russian avant-garde art in the twenties, as well as its failures and misconceptions, can be followed in Osip Brik's writings of the time. As the main proponent of Constructivism, he championed the idea of bringing art into production. Brik founded the theory of 'social demand' (*sotsial'ny zakaz*) and played an important part in *Lef's* promulgation of 'literature of fact'. His inquiry into the problems of art production and consumption, the evolution of artistic forms, traditions and innovations, in particular the innovations required by emerging social changes, covered various forms and aspects of contemporary art: photography, painting, cinema, literature, popular entertainment.

The great experiments carried out by the Soviet film-makers of the twenties attracted Brik both as a polemicist in theoretical debate, and as a professional scriptwriter conversant with the specific requirements of the cinema. His main achievement was the script of Pudovkin's *Storm over Asia* (*The Heir to Genghis Khan*), released in 1928.

From the first revolutionary years Brik took an active part in the creation of the Soviet press and was on the editorial board of various art magazines: *Iskusstvo Kommuny* (*Art of the Commune*), 1918-1919; *Khudozhestvennaya Zhizn'* (*Artistic Life*), 1919-1920; the humourist journal *BOV*, 1921; *Sovetsky Ekran* (*Soviet Screen*), 1925-1929; *The Weekly of the Central House of the Workers in Education and Art*, 1922; *Novy Zritel'* (*New Spectator*), theatre weekly of the Moscow education department – *MONO*, 1924-1929.

His major activity during the 1920s was undoubtedly his editorial work and theoretical contributions to Mayakovsky's *Lef* (1923-1925) and *Novy Lef* (1927-1928). Brik resigned from *Lef* in 1928 together with Mayakovsky to organise REF, proclaimed to be 'to the left of *Lef*'. Soon after that *Lef* ceased publication. Mayakovsky joined RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) in 1930; several months later he committed suicide. In 1932 the Writers' Union was established and all the previous literary groupings were abolished.

Brik continued writing during the thirties and early forties. Apart from literary journalism and criticism, he wrote opera libretti, theatre adaptations of Russian classical novels and film scenarios. However, his most interesting and illuminating works of this period were articles on Mayakovsky, and retrospective accounts of the

literary battles of the 1920s.

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Brik died in 1945. The Writers' Union administration did not deem him worthy of an obituary in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (*The Literary Gazette*).

Osip Brik joined the ranks of the Futurists at a time of extreme confusion in the arts. The years preceding the first world war in Russia witnessed an unprecedented artistic upheaval, the emergence of new belligerent movements and the disintegration of old schools and traditions.

In 1912 Aleksandr Benois, the prominent painter and art critic of the 'World of Art' wrote in the newspaper *Rech* (No 100, April 13, 1912):

'Future generations will either ridicule the time we are living in or see it as unhappy and tragically insane. There have already been such periods in history, when considerable sections of society withdrew into labyrinths of obscure theorisation and lost all joy of life. But our epoch can hardly be compared to any of the previous ones. For the last ten years we have had an uninterrupted and ever-growing nightmare in art, which is the most reliable thermometer of public spiritual health.'

The new art asserted itself by mocking all the prevailing conventions. It exposed the illusory nature of realism, as something 'mirroring' a fictitious world, and debunked the 'objective' cognitive function of representational art.

The first Futurist manifestos rent the air. *Zaum* was declared the primary basis of art – the trans-sense use of primary elements of art: the 'self-orientated word' in poetry, or line and colour in nonobjective painting, ie when the material of a given art is liberated from its 'traditional subservience to meaning'⁵ and used as an expressive entity in its own right. It was discovered that 'the artist sees his pictures as an interplay of colours; verses come to the poet as a rhythmical impulse and obscure sounds before they are expressed in words.'⁶

Painting departed from the 'literary plots' which had been so characteristic of nineteenth-century Russian art. 'Wild' artists' rooms became part of every Petersburg exhibition. The works of Larionov and Goncharova, which revived the tradition of Russian icon-painting and *lubok* (peasant woodcuts) were displayed next to genteel 'World of Art' paintings. Russian Primitivism, blended with European Modernist movements, evolved into Rayonism. Malevich launched Suprematism, the first systematic school of abstract painting. Tatlin laid the foundations of Constructivism.⁷

'A civil war of forms was going on in poetry. Now painting invaded poetry.'⁸ Most of the Russian Cubo-Futurist poets came to poetry from painting: David Burlyuk, Mayakovsky, Kruchenykh, Elena Guro. The same applies to members of other Futurist groups:

38 Sergei Bobrov of the Centrifuge, and Khrisanf (Lev Zak) of the Mezzanine of Poetry. One can also mention Khlebnikov, Kamensky, Zdanevich and Nikolai Burlyuk, who painted and made drawings and book illustrations. The interplay of visual and verbal images can be seen in all Mayakovsky's early poems ('Port', 1912; 'From Street to Street', 1913; 'What about you?', 1913; 'Great Big Hell of a City', 1913), which appear as poetic illustrations of contemporary Modernist paintings.⁹ Kruchenykh, in the 'Declaration of Word as Such' in 1913, pointed out the similarity of the devices used in Futurist poetry and painting:

'Futurist painters (*budetlyane*) like to use parts of the body, cross-sections, Futurist poets (*budetlyane rechetvortsy*) use chopped words, half words, and their whimsical, intricate combinations (trans-sense language).'¹⁰

The very name 'Cubo-Futurism' adopted by Moscow Futurists in about 1913, synthesised the close affinity between Futurist poetry and Cubist painting. Historically, it attested to the syncretisation of the traditionally incompatible devices of temporal and spatial arts. Ironically enough, the commonly accepted term encapsulated the two artistic trends which were equally 'incomprehensible' to the contemporary public and to art critics. The important point is that both Futurism and Cubism confronted readers and viewers with the deliberate distortion of reality, impeded form ('as if it were written with difficulty and read with difficulty'¹²), an orientation towards the linguistic or pictorial material and an emphasis on technique. Thus, already at this stage the Futurists were inclined to dispense with 'inspiration' and the concept of 'poetry as magic' and to see themselves primarily as craftsmen. This development is crucial for the understanding of post-revolutionary Futurist aesthetics.

The emergence of the Formal School of literary criticism was very closely related to Futurism. The Futurist revolutionary innovations in poetry and, in particular, their insistence on the 'emancipation' of the poetic word and experiments in trans-sense language, defied the purely thematic interpretation of verse, as well as the symbolist belief in the evocative power.¹³ The new study of poetic language as a special type of human discourse orientated towards a specific function – aesthetic effect – was historically bound up with Futurist experiments, in which the poetic devices were deliberately 'laid bare'. The analysis of trans-sense poetry was a starting point for the differentiation of 'poetic' and 'practical' speech set forth in the pioneering Formalist essay *Resurrection of the Word* by Shklovsky (1914). It established the Formalist orientation towards the perception of literary work and introduced the concept of 'perceptibility' or 'palpability' (*oshchutimost'*): automatised and de-automatised perception – 'recognition' versus 'seeing', which later crystallised into the theory of

Brik's creative initiative played a significant part in the formation of Opoyaz (1916-1917) and the methodological discussions of the Moscow Linguistic Circle (1919-1920). Brik's study of poetic euphony and rhythm, and his ideas on the autonomous value of sounds in poetry were instrumental in the Formalists' endeavour 'to liberate the poetic word from the fetters of philosophical and religious tendencies, which had achieved considerable prominence in Symbolism'.¹⁵ The attention paid to the phonic form of poetic language in early Formalists' works (L Yakubinsky's 'The Sounds of Poetic Language' and 'The Accumulation of Identical Liquids in Practical and in Poetic Speech', Polivanov's 'Sound-Gestures in the Japanese Language' and Brik's 'Sound Repetitions'¹⁶) promoted the differentiation of 'poetic' and 'practical' speech according to its purpose, and assisted in undermining the prevailing theory of poetry as 'thinking in images'.

In his first published essay on 'Sound Repetitions' (1917) Brik refuted the traditional dichotomy of content and form in poetry, when the latter – the immediately perceivable euphonic means like rhyme, assonance, alliteration and sound-imitation – is regarded either as a purely external embellishment (nineteenth-century realism), or as the embodiment of poetry's evocative power (Symbolism). Brik's discovery and classification of the repetitions of consonantal groups in Russian verse was used to demonstrate the innermost ties between sound and meaning in poetry, ie the role of euphony in the creation of figures of speech, the interaction of phonic and semantic devices. Sound orchestration, Brik argued, is not an extrinsic device applied to poetic creation. Very often the poet starts from a consonant word prompted by the ear and works towards its logical justification. Rhyme and alliteration are only the most obvious euphonic devices; the whole sound structure is involved.

The convergence of poetic movement and literary scholarship took the form of close collaboration through co-operative work and personal friendships. The Petersburg flat of Osip and Lilya Brik soon became a gathering place where young Formalist researchers in literature and Futurist poets held their discussions.

Mayakovsky wrote later in his autobiography 'I Myself': 'Most Joyful Date. July, 1915. Made acquaintance of L Y and O M Brik.'¹⁷ This must have been equally true for Osip Brik – since that day his life acquired new meaning and orientation. Lilya's sister, later known as the French novelist Elsa Triolet, took the young boisterous Futurist to the Brik's. Lilya cautiously warned her not to ask him to read his poetry. But Elsa disobeyed her: Mayakovsky read 'Cloud in Trousers'.¹⁸ The Briks were fascinated. Osip Brik immediately decided to put up the money for its publication. Thus a small publishing enterprise was born – OMB, Brik's initials. In the same year Brik published the Futurist anthology *Took: A*

40 *Futurists' Drum* (*Vzyl: Baraban Futuristov*), which carried his first laudation of Futurism, 'Bread!'. Brik compared Mayakovsky's verse to daily bread long awaited by everyone who had become fed up with the symbolist 'sugary cakes'. In 1916 Brik published Mayakovsky's poem 'Backbone Flute', and later the two earliest collections of Formalist essays on the theory of poetic language *Sborniki po teorii poeticheskogo yazyka* (in 1916 and 1917).

Mayakovsky introduced his Futurist friends Khlebnikov, Burlyuk, Kamensky and Victor Shklovsky to the Briks. Soon they were joined by young philologists: Kushner, Yakubinsky and Polivanov. In his recollections of Mayakovsky, Vasily Kamensky noted: 'To visit the Briks became a matter of culture and of great pleasure'.¹⁹

The February Revolution (1917) was greeted with great enthusiasm by the artistic world, left and right alike. The unprecedented liberalisation spurred the political activities of all sections of the population. For the artists it meant the possibility of creating autonomous corporate organisations independent from the State. Another reason which prompted the artists to take the initiative in cultural affairs was the immediate need to take measures for the protection of art collections and historic monuments, which were under the constant threat of destruction during the period of war and revolution.

On March 8, 1917, Gorky published his appeal to the intelligentsia:

'Citizens! The old masters have departed, leaving behind them a great inheritance which now belongs to the entire people.

Citizens, protect that inheritance. . . .

Art — is the beauty which men of talent were able to create even in conditions of despotic oppression, bearing witness to beauty and the might of the human soul. . . .'²⁰

The Provisional Government formed a Committee responsible for the preservation of art treasures and put forward the idea of replacing the Imperial Palace Ministry, which controlled the imperial theatres, the Academy of Arts and the royal palaces, with a Ministry of Fine Arts. The artists saw this as an attempt by the government to take the arts under its own control. The matter was discussed at a meeting of Petrograd writers and artists held on March 12, 1917. This meeting led to the creation of the Artists' Union, which opposed the government and declared itself the sole authority responsible for all artistic activities in the country.

From the very beginning the Union split into three factions: the right (*delovoi blok*) led by F Sologub, the 'left bloc' including Mayakovsky, Brik and Punin, and the 'non-party centre'. It was the 'left bloc' members who, after the October Revolution, went to work in Lunacharsky's Commissariat for Enlightenment and became the main spokesmen for socialist culture. However, their

political awareness at that time is often overrated, and their transition from left-wing bohemian rebellion to Communist ideology was not as smooth as it is usually presented.

This left faction, united in the 'Freedom for Art' federation, was in fact most belligerent on the question of the autonomy of art. The 'Freedom for Art' group immediately elaborated the programme which they wanted to serve as the basis for the activity of the Artists' Union:

'Freedom to art: abolition of State control. Complete decentralisation of artistic life and autonomy of all institutions and societies, which should be financed by the municipal authorities. The establishment of all-Russian Congresses of Artists. The Artists' Union to be represented in legislative organs by its executive committee. Abolition of all Academies and their replacement by the Arts Universities responsible for the education of art teachers. Replacement of patronage by public support in the form of grants and advances. . . .'²¹

Since the left artists found themselves in the minority in the Union, they decided to promulgate their programme prior to the general meeting. The 'Freedom for Art' federation issued a declaration which expressed its categorical protest against 'the undemocratic attempts of certain groups to obtain control of the arts through the establishment of a Ministry of the Arts', and appealed 'to all persons active in the arts sympathetic to it to come today at two o'clock to a mass meeting of artists in the Mikhailovsky Theatre and vote for the following, who are defending the freedom of artistic life: N I Altman, K I Arabazhin, V A Denisov, I M Zdanevich, S K Isakov, M Kuzmin, V N Kulyabko-Koretskaya, V Mayakovsky, V E Meyerhold, N N Punin, S Prokofiev, V N Soloviev'. Mayakovsky's speech at the March 1917 meeting gives a clear idea of the leftists' political beliefs and inclinations at that time:

'I have come on behalf of the artists who have raised the flag of revolution – art is in danger. In the days of great upheavals art always dies down. The arm raised against the Tsarist system has come down on the palaces, and the protection of palaces was a task of those who founded the commission with Gorky. This task can be easily done, just by positioning groups of soldiers. The other task is more complex and essential. Whenever there is a surge of social unrest, they say there is no room for artists, for art, that every artist has to contribute to political work, pertaining to Russia's new model. This matter we can absolutely entrust to the Provisional Government which has proclaimed freedom and is its guarantor. All these tasks we can transfer [a gap in the transcript] . . . and to the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. Our cause – art – must mean in the future state the right of free determination for all creative artists. A Provisional Committee has

42 now been appointed numbering 12 persons.* It seems to me that this committee cannot be competent even as far as the protection of monuments is concerned, because it has not been elected according to democratic principles. I respect all persons who are members of this committee, I have a deep respect for Gorky, who has fought for the freedom of art, but I am against its organisational defects. If there is a ministry, then only the well-known group of the 'World of Art' will be a part of it. Benois is a follower of a definite trend in art, to me incomplete. Palaces where Somov's works are stored will be protected [a gap in the transcript]. . . . There exists a distinctive Russian art which is the expression of democratic tendencies. Benois cannot deal with art realised through a broad democracy [a gap in the transcript]. . . . For a broad scope, broad representation is essential. [Applause.] You have been given a programme of organisation of art which seems acceptable to us. There will be an organising committee which will prepare a provisional assembly dealing with current needs of art. In this way the Constituent Assembly will be prepared and when our friends come back from the front, it will decide how to administer Russian art. I am against a ministry, etc. I regard it as essential that art be concentrated in one definite place. My motto, and that of everybody is – long live the political life of Russia and long live art free from politics!'

When someone protested by asking why cab drivers, cobblers and bakers could participate in politics and artists could not, Mayakovsky replied: 'I do not withdraw from politics, only in the sphere of art there should be no politics'.²²

It is interesting to note that at this time the extreme bohemian demand for the autonomy of art was in no way dictated by the artist's rejection of the existing political power. It simply stressed the fact that the government should not meddle with the arts nor artists with politics. The meeting passed a motion expressing its support for the Provisional Government, the Soviet of Workers and Soldiers' Deputies²³ and the Executive Committee of the State Duma.²⁴ It seems that the left and the right were at one on this point. This, of course, reflects the initial intoxication of the intelligentsia with the Provisional Government regime which affected even the artists politically close to Bolshevism. It took some time for a critical sense to develop, and this soon became apparent in Mayakovsky's own poetry.

One can see that at that stage the fight on the artistic front was not primarily political. It was a fight for dominance in the arts and an attempt on the part of avant-garde artists to secure the supremacy of their own artistic trends. All this partially explains Mayakovsky's and Brik's 'delay'²⁵ in joining forces with

* The reference is to the Committee appointed by the Provisional Government for the protection of art treasures.

Lunacharsky, People's Commissar of Education, after the October Revolution. It also adds a new dimension to the study of the Futurists' polemics with Proletkult in 1918-1919, and with The Association of Proletarian Writers during the 1920's. 43

The 'left bloc', which was formed in order to counteract the 'power-hungry' people of the 'World of Art', was torn by further disagreements. Mayakovsky soon declared that he 'did not recognise any left, except himself, Burlyuk and Larionov'.²⁸ At the meeting of the 'Freedom for Art' federation held on March 21, 1917, he proclaimed himself and his followers to be 'to the left of the left federation', called for the intensification of the ideological struggle and the creation of a special syndicate of Futurists headed by him.²⁷

Politically, Mayakovsky's support for the Soviet Government was expressed unequivocally immediately after the October Revolution.²⁸ But in the sphere of art the leftists at first behaved in solidarity with the rest of the Artists' Union, defended their autonomy and showed great resistance to Lunacharsky's attempts to create an alliance with the intelligentsia.

Lunacharsky's cultural policy was broad enough to welcome artists of all schools and traditions as long as they were willing to lend their professional assistance in cultural and educational matters. At the Union meeting held on November 12, 1917, Punin presented Lunacharsky's proposal for the creation of a joint Soviet on art affairs, consisting of artists and representatives of the Soviet of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies. The Union rejected the proposal unanimously. After this Lunacharsky tried to approach the Union with a suggestion for a more limited collaboration in the protection of art treasures.²⁹ This time Osip Brik acted as a mediator between the People's Commissar and the Artists' Union. On behalf of Lunacharsky he suggested the formation of a committee consisting of 30 people – 15 from democratic organisations and 15 from the Union – which would be responsible solely for the protection of historic monuments. This move was also rejected (with two abstentions, one is believed to have been Mayakovsky). Sologub's position that 'Lunacharsky is not the people, but a "gentleman in a jacket", from whom it is necessary to protect art, which is the property of the whole people'³⁰ met only one objection, put forward by Mayakovsky. Though agreeing with Sologub in principle, Mayakovsky maintained that in order to gain access to that property, artists must 'welcome the new power and open up relations with it'.³¹ Most of Mayakovsky's biographers mention only the last part of this speech. Others present, including Brik, stood for the immediate calling of an All-Russian meeting of artists and writers, to be the only representative authority on artistic affairs.

Although many of the left wing artists were very close to the Bolsheviks in their political outlook, once again the disagreement

44 between the artistic left and right was not defined in political terms. This was confirmed in Sologub's second speech: 'There is no difference in our attitude to Golovin³² or Lunacharsky. The basis for disagreement is our different artistic views'.³³ The shortsightedness of this statement is obvious. It did not take long for the gulf between the right and the left to widen. The final split occurred in the spring of 1918, when the left artists left the Union. And while the bulk of the Russian intelligentsia decamped to Europe or withdrew into internal emigration, the left artists became virtually the only artistic group which offered its support to the Soviet Government, and began to participate in its cultural organisations and institutions.

The Section of Fine Arts – IZO (*Otdel izobrazitel'nykh iskussty*) of Narkompros was created in Petrograd on January 29, 1918. The head of IZO and of its Petrograd section was the painter David Shterenberg. The Moscow branch was led by the Constructivist Tatlin. From the very beginning the IZO Art collegium consisted almost exclusively of avant-garde artists.³⁴ Brik and Mayakovsky joined the Art collegium of IZO in the Autumn of 1918.

But while the Futurists were keen on presenting their art as the artistic counterpart of the October Revolution – an idea prompted by their equation of avant-garde art with revolutionary politics and traditional art with reactionary politics – the Soviet authorities were not so sure. The Futurists' dominance in the Narkompros Art Section immediately put the Soviet press on the alert. On December 29, 1917, *Izvestia* published an article which cautioned the proletariat to maintain its critical judgement of artists who hurried to climb on the bandwagon of its victory:

'The Futurists, penetrating into the proletarian milieu, could bring the putrid poison of the decaying bourgeois organism into the healthy spirit of the proletariat'.³⁵

According to the author of the article, the proletariat needed an art in which 'beautiful form is the reflection of a rich content'.³⁶ The non-traditionalists' idea of art which could express the very essence of the revolutionary process was a diametrically opposite one – 'break and destroy forms in order to create new ones',³⁷ make the revolution in art:

'If we, destroying old forms of human culture, created new forms appropriate to new content, we have the right to state that we are doing great revolutionary work'.³⁸

This was the line taken by the Futurist paper *Art of the Commune*, officially the organ of IZO Narkompros, which began to appear in Petrograd in December 1918. The editors of *Art of the Commune* were Osip Brik, the painter Natan Altman, and the art critic Nikolai Punin. Other people who contributed to the paper included Mayakovsky, the artists Malevich, Chagall, and Ivan Puni,

the Formalist theorists Boris Kushner and Victor Shklovsky, and the theatre director Meyerhold. The belligerent tone of the paper and its exaggerated claims to represent the officially accepted artistic trend made Lunacharsky intervene with an article, 'A Spoonful of Antidote' (No 4, December 29, 1918), and the paper was closed after 19 issues in 1919.³⁹

It should be noted at this point that the very term Futurism was now used rather loosely, often meaning avant-garde art in general. The term was applied to a rather heterogeneous conglomeration of artistic trends, all of which were intensely hostile to a realist representation of life and repudiated traditional artistic values. From now on in this article the use of this term will therefore refer to the artists who identified themselves under this name rather than to Futurists in the strict sense of the word.

The avant-garde artists were naturally drawn to the revolution and were inspired by it, for they believed that the overthrow of the old order and the emancipation of the working masses would also mean their own liberation from the oppressive constraints of bourgeois artistic production and consumption. The artist could now transcend his social isolation and overcome his traditional alienation from the public. However, despite this unifying principle among the left artists, the direction of their formal experimentation and their political awareness varied considerably.

The revolution gave a new impetus to the Futurists' attacks on the art of the past, which could now be discarded as being superfluous to the needs of the victorious proletariat. But merely adhering to proletarian ideology could not in itself solve the Futurists' aesthetic predicament of the primacy of form over content. The notion that new words create new meanings was now rephrased, but not revoked: 'New phenomena should be rendered in new words.' 'We need a new art form', Mayakovsky declared, 'It is not enough to build a statue of a metal worker, it is essential that the statue should be different from the monument of the Printer erected by the Tsar'.⁴⁰ Thus the idea that art should put itself at the service of the revolution was closely linked to the idea of a corresponding revolutionary development in art itself, which should have a disturbing effect on the human psyche, thereby causing a radical change in man's vision of the world.

The new Futurist aesthetic asserted itself under an array of external and internal pressures. Having jostled away its right-wing opponents with relative ease, the Futurists had to stand up to a more difficult ideological adversary on the left. The main rival for the monopoly of the country's artistic life was Proletkult – the Proletarian Cultural and Educational Organisation founded by A A Bogdanov in 1917. The Proletkult leaders distinguished three independent aspects of the working class movement: economic, political and cultural. While trade unions and the party could direct the economic and political struggle, the task of a cultural organisa-

46 tion was to explore the proletariat's cultural needs and to encourage grass-roots creativity. To complete its victory the proletariat – now the ascendant class – had to reappraise the bourgeois cultural heritage and create its own class culture: 'Having defeated the bourgeoisie physically, we must also defeat it spiritually'.⁴ To this end Proletkult demanded complete autonomy from Narkompros, in which class allegiance was inevitably weakened by the obligation to educate the whole of the country's population. Moreover, in a certain sense Proletkult challenged the Party's role as the sole political and ideological vanguard of the proletariat.

Proletkult saw itself as 'a laboratory of pure proletarian ideology' and believed that a truly proletarian art could only be born as a result of the proletariat's experience – its working and social conditions. To achieve this, Proletkult founded a network of art and literary studios at factories throughout the country. Admission to the studios was restricted to industrial workers, excluding even administrative personnel.

The Proletkult position was opposed by Osip Brik in the second issue of *Art of the Commune*. Brik maintained that proletarian art was not art for the proletariat or art of the proletariat but art by a proletarian artist – an artist with both talent and a proletarian consciousness. For Brik 'art for the proletariat' implied 'clarity and 'easy accessibility' and therefore was condescending and stupefying, while 'art of the proletariat', ie when one lays claim to proletarian art simply on the grounds of being a worker, could only result in a mediocre imitation of antiquated artistic conventions.

According to Brik the proletarian artist differed from his bourgeois counterpart not because he worked for a different client or came from a different social class, but because his attitude to art and the artist's place in society was different. The artist was no longer an outsider, a devotee of pure beauty, an individualist aesthete producing for a private client. In his article 'The Drainage of Art', Brik urged artists to share in the process of social reconstruction by bringing their talent and professional skill to the aid of the working masses: 'Streets, factories, workshops await the artists who could give them the models for new unknown objects'.⁴ The principle of innovation in form was reorientated towards new objectives – the practical demands of the day. This was the first pronouncement of production art and it anticipated later *Le Corbusier* theories of 'social demand' and 'art as life-building'. To prove himself a useful and active citizen, the artist had to transcend the traditional realm of art – henceforth labelled as 'individualist', 'speculative', 'hedonistic' and so on – and bring art into production, join the worker in the construction of useful material objects and contribute to the creation of a new way of life. According to Brik, this was not 'the death' of art, but its necessary 'drainage'; the only guarantee that 'art will not perish but will find its place

within the very structures of communal life'. Only socially useful work can 'give the artist the right to stand next to other working members of the Commune: cobblers, carpenters, tailors'.⁴³ Thus in fact the Futurists turned the tables on Proletkult (which expected workers to become artists) by urging artists to become workers.

The important question is whether this extreme utilitarianism should be considered merely as an accommodation to the external situation, or whether there had been something inherent in previous artistic experiments which was stimulated by the revolution. It would be ludicrous to deny the tremendous impact of the October Revolution on the intelligentsia. The 'proletarianisation' of Futurist aesthetics was partly a response to the social changes, which questioned the role of art and artists in a new society. The proletariat became the hero of the time as the only class capable of changing the face of the earth, and the intelligentsia began to feel 'inferior'. The problem was even more acute for the Futurists, who constantly had to defend their art against charges of its unintelligibility to the masses. Moreover, it was the conjunction of the social revolution with the envisaged technological 'take-off' that appealed to the Futurists' urban and technicist drive. Their allegiance to the proletariat was not exclusively political but was to some extent dictated by their fascination with machine industry and with the new dynamic man who mastered the machine.

It thus appears that the revolution acted as a catalyst for tendencies already present in the movement. The Futurist activist notion of art, not as a passive reflection of life, but as its creative disruption, was reoriented towards positive goals. This was not a compromise towards representation, but a further move towards the decanonisation and de-aestheticisation of art, which had been so characteristic of Futurism from its very beginning. The idea of bridging the gap between artistic creation and real life was not new to the Futurists. It had been expressed before the revolution in the attempts to dispense with picture frames or in Tatlin's reliefs – 'real material in real space'. 'We go hand in hand with house-painters',⁴⁴ announced Larionov as early as 1913, and indeed, 'The Target (*Mishen*)', an exhibition held by his group in Moscow the same year, included six works by members of 'The Second Workshop of Sign Painters'. The same tendency was apparent even in such eccentric 'happenings' as at the opening of the cabaret 'Pink Lantern' in October 1913, where Larionov and Goncharova put paint on their own and other people's faces. The manifesto 'Why we paint ourselves' proclaimed:

'We have linked art with life. After the long seclusion of the master, we loudly called life in, and life invaded art. It is time for art to invade life. The painting of faces is the beginning of the invasion.'⁴⁵

In poetry it manifested itself in the Futurists' attempts to fuse their

poetry with 'the street' by adopting its language and by their desire to write verses 'on the corners of walls, fences, roofs, the streets of our cities and villages, on the backs of automobiles, carriages, streetcars, and on the clothes of all citizens!'⁴⁶ (This suggests that together with their political awakening it was also their previously developed artistic techniques that enabled the Futurists to put their art at the service of the revolution in a much more effective and spontaneous way than could have been done by artists of other schools. Futurist agit-prop verses, poster designs and advertising jingles were not a concession to dictates from outside, but a conscious drive to apply their skill to the most urgent social tasks, which required a unique ability to communicate in a laconic, graphic, eye-catching form.)

In the sphere of the visual arts the earlier Futurist preoccupation with the material of their art as an expressive entity in its own right passed its 'trans-sense' stage and looked for some functional implementation. The starting point of Constructivism, which emphasised both the visual and the tactile qualities of the chosen artistic medium, and introduced real space as a pictorial element, made a logical transition from abstract planimetric composition to abstract spatial construction and eventually to the application of its artistic principles in the design of useful material objects. An important precondition for this development was also the Futurist concept of 'art as labour' – a conscious effort with a calculated effect – as opposed to 'inspiration', 'magic' and similar notions, which were now discarded as part and parcel of bourgeois cultural mystification. The very terms 'creation', 'talent', 'work of art' were gradually replaced in the Futurist vocabulary by concepts like 'skill', 'craftsmanship', 'construction of materials', and 'manufacture of material objects'. Similar 'functionalist' tendencies were manifested outside Russia (though often through the direct or indirect influence of Russian artists), notably at the Weimar Bauhaus. This reinforces the idea that the development of functionalism was not dependent on a particular political milieu, that it had an ideological imperative engendered by a particular kind of alienation experienced by modern man: 'The loss of creative unity which has resulted from technological development. . . . The loss of contact between the individual and the community.'⁴⁷

The first objection to the subordination of art to practical purposes within the Futurist camp was voiced in *Art of the Commune* by the artist Ivan Puni (Jean Pougny).^{*} Puni argued that the construction of a functional object is entirely determined by its intended purpose. The artist has nothing to do in industry, his role can only be subsidiary. Far from the artist's influencing material

* The similarity of the names Puni and Punin led to a misprint in Richard Sherwood's introduction to *Documents from Lef (Screen, v 12, no 4, Winter 1971/72)* where Puni's position was inadvertently ascribed to Punin.

production, the reverse takes place – the works of left artists reflect their own enthrallment by the visual and structural aspects of modern material culture, which was created spontaneously, without the artist's participation. Hence 'the unity of the principle of construction, utility, will create beauty, and beauty will create us artists'.⁴⁸

A more radical opposition to the reduction of art to mere engineering was soon to come from other avant-garde artists like Kandinsky and Malevich, who, each in his own way, defended the autonomy of art as a spiritual activity with a validity of its own. The increasing bias towards functionalism in the newly established Soviet art schools Vkhutemas (Higher Studios of Art and Design, 1920-1925) and Inkhuk (Institute of Artistic Culture, 1920-1924) led to a split between avant-garde artists in 1921, when Kandinsky and 'pure' constructivists Naum Gabo and Anton Pevsner left Inkhuk. After the departure of Kandinsky⁴⁹ the post of chairman of Inkhuk was held successively by Rodchenko, Brik and Arvatov, who championed Constructivism and production art.

Inkhuk,⁵⁰ which was set up by IZO Narkompros as a research institute for the theoretical study of the visual arts, immediately became a centre of fierce artistic and ideological debate. The artists and theorists who formed the Constructivist group, Rodchenko, Stepanova, the Stenberg brothers, Popova, Gan, Brik, and Kushner, took up the argument of *Art of the Commune*. Brik spoke on 'What should the artist do in the meantime?', Tarabukin gave a paper entitled 'The last easel picture has been painted'. Their polemics were directed against all forms of 'pure' or easel painting. Their opponents, led by Babichev,⁵¹ who believed that production art should develop alongside the traditional easel and monumental forms, found themselves in a conspicuous minority at the Institute.

In this debate on the future development of the visual arts Brik took the most extreme position. His total condemnation of easel painting was based on two assumptions: one, that easel art was timeless and non-utilitarian and served no other purpose than that of 'delighting the eye', while contemporary cultural work should be entirely purpose-orientated; two, that the methods and devices of easel art are of no use to an artist-engineer, whose task of designing articles suitable for mass production requires a special professional training, a *sui generis* technique, which is neither derived from nor, in any sense, 'inferior' to the technique of easel painting.⁵² To work out the most rational principles of production design the artist must master all the skills that go into the making of the final product. Already in the days of *Art of the Commune* an idea was put forward for the creation of a new type of art school, where workers from different branches of industry could study artistic technique related to their professional skills: carpenters would work with wood, metal workers with metal, and

This implies that for Brik (as later for other theorists of *Lef*) production art was not confined to a social 'redemption' of the artist, but had a more radical aim of overcoming the producer's alienation from his product and, finally, of abolishing the social division between mental and manual labour:

'We want every worker who shapes and colours an object to understand why this object should have this very shape and colour. We want the worker no longer to be a mechanical executor of some unknown project. The worker must become a conscious, active participant of the creative process of making an object.'⁵⁴

Though some of the Constructivists did go to work in factories (Tatlin worked in the Lessner metallurgical factory near Petrograd, Popova and Stepanova designed fabrics in the Tsindel textile factory near Moscow), most of the Vkhutemas projects remained on paper. This was partly due to economic exigencies, but also to the obduracy of established tastes, which rejected these innovations.

The drive towards the fusion of art with life, the transformation of the aesthetic function into a powerful weapon for the reconstruction of society, formed the aesthetic programme of *Lef* (1923-1925) and *Novy Lef* (1927-1928), which once again united the artistic avant-garde on a common platform.

Despite the fact that his written contributions were few, Brik appears to have been the moving force behind the activities of *Lef*. He was an efficient organiser, an ideologue and a spokesman of the movement. This can be established from his theoretical articles and statements, which summarise the collective views of *Lef* and suggest the direction of further research. Brik's most important role was as a link-man between Futurism and the formal school of literary criticism.

The aesthetic argument of *Lef* was a further attempt to reformulate avant-garde views and Formalist literary theory in the light of Communist ideology. Brik was amongst the first Formalists to question the earlier notion of the autonomy of artistic evolution:⁵⁵

'Art is first and foremost a social phenomenon. Changes in the psychology of the artist and the public, and changes of artistic forms are but a reflection of deeper changes which take place in the social nature of art.'⁵⁶

The Formalists, who initially saw literary evolution as a ceaseless alteration in the hierarchy of literary genres, now acknowledged a constant shift in the boundaries that delimit art from extra-aesthetic phenomena. This theoretical premise was both a repercussion of and a justification of new trends in Futurism, agit and production art, and later, literature of fact.

Yet despite his emphasis on art's social role, Brik's aesthetic

views are still subsumed within the basic tenets of Formalism. As has already been pointed out, production art was an offshoot of non-objective art. It conformed to the Formalist idea that art was not a mode of cognition, and on this assumption it was presented as a socialist alternative to representational forms. In production art the artist's craft in transforming raw material into 'an object' is still in operation (though in a somewhat modified way), and from this point of view it could be argued that there was no qualitative difference between writing lyrical verses and designing utilitarian articles:⁵⁷

'There is no 'pure' and 'impure' art ... the only difference between a picture and a signboard is that they are different things, not that they are products of two different kinds of activity, of which one is 'pure' and the other is 'impure'.

This was Brik's rebuttal to the accusation by the Imagist poet Shershenevich that the Futurists were merely 'hack-workers':

'If the poet writes agit and advertising jingles investing the maximum of his creative ingenuity, then it is by no means hack-work, but real art.'⁵⁸

The view that verses are *made* by a poet using a set of previously elaborated and accumulated poetic devices was set out by Mayakovsky in his account of his poetic work:

'Poetry is a manufacture. A very difficult, very complex kind, but a manufacture. ... You mustn't make the manufacturing, the so-called technical process, an end in itself. But it is this process of manufacture that makes the poetic work fit for use.'⁵⁹

Thus art was still 'a device',⁶⁰ what had changed from the original Formalist interpretation was the application of the device. The emphasis was shifted from the aesthetic function of the device to its use in the service of a 'social demand'. All the manifestations of the device, including the extreme case of 'the device laid bare' in trans-sense poetry, were now considered in the light of their potential social utility: '*not an aesthetic end in itself, but a laboratory for the best possible expression of the facts of the present day*'.⁶¹

By positing 'social demand' as the mandatory determinant Brik endeavoured, in his article 'The So-called "Formal Method"',⁶² to vindicate the device as the unique 'hero', the sole matter of investigation of scientific poetics.⁶³ The article was written in reply to numerous critics of Opoyaz, who ranged from the literary historian Pyotr Kogan, who prided himself on never having had 'time for the study of literary form',⁶⁴ to such a connoisseur of literature as the Centrifuge poet and mathematician Sergei Bobrov.⁶⁵

Brik's article preceded Trotsky's charge⁶⁶ that Formalists reversed the order of consciousness and being. Therefore Brik does not

52 attempt to refute this charge, arguing entirely within the confines of the Formalist method. He retains the 'objectivist' aspect of Formalism by leaving the personality of the artist out of consideration: 'The social role of a poet cannot be understood from an analysis of his personal qualities and habits.' The poet's choice of subject is determined by his social milieu and therefore is of interest only to his biographer. The sole matter of concern for a literary scholar is 'why, in the processing of themes, poets use certain devices and not others; what causes the appearance of a new device; how an old one dies'. Having set out the main methodological principles of Opoyaz, Brik proclaims it 'the best educator for young proletarian writers', who are 'still afflicted with a thirst for "self-revelation"':

'Opoyaz will show them that everything great has been created in answer to questions of the day, that what becomes "eternal" today, was once a topic of the time, and that the great poet does not reveal himself, but simply fulfils a social demand. . . .

'Opoyaz will come to the aid of proletarian creative work not with hazy little chats about the "proletarian spirit" and "Communist consciousness", but with exact technical knowledge of the devices of contemporary poetic work.'

Thus the two notions regarded by Brik as essential for the creation of a class-conscious, revolutionary art – the awareness of a social demand and expert knowledge of artistic technique – not only retain their autonomy vis-à-vis one another, but also remain extrinsic to the artist's personality and social experience – 'the poet is a craftsman in his trade. That is all'.⁶⁷

The theory of 'social demand' immediately came under attack, for it was equally unacceptable to critics like Voronsky and Polonsky, who supported the traditionalist literature of the 'fellow-travellers', and to the stalwarts of the *On Guard*⁶⁸ group. In spite of their differences both camps subscribed to the idea that art was an unconscious reflection of the artist's world-view. They accused Brik of divorcing the artist from his class, of presenting the relationship between the artist and his class as a transactional arrangement between a client placing an order and a person filling the order. But 'social demand' found some supporters in the ranks of Marxist critics like Pavel Kogan, who went so far as to suggest that Marxist literary criticism should concentrate on 'investigating the paths leading from the class-client to the artist-craftsman'.⁶⁹ However, the weight Brik gave to the principle of social demand antagonised some of his fellow Formalists, as well as the politically uncommitted writers associated with *Lef* like Boris Pasternak, who deplored that *Lef* theorists 'had all but declared that the cleaning of brass door-handles was art'.⁷⁰

Brik's aesthetic argument was an attempt to correlate his awareness of artistic form with his concern for the social role of art.

Sometimes one won over the other. Yet despite the apparent rigidity and rigorousness of his views, he was a searcher, not a dogmatist. His excesses, illusions, and mistakes, are still valuable. 53

The magazines *Lef* and *Novy Lef* were an artists' 'guild', which provided scope for divergent views and free discussion among its members. *Lef's* aesthetic platform was moulded in this atmosphere of collective work and ceaseless debate, and then presented in all its divergency in the pages of the magazine. It was this principle of the creative 'laboratory' that Brik defended against Chuzhak's view that *Lef* should become a rigid, unified organisation:

'We'll always have many disagreements, but we should not suppress them, because without disagreements *Lef's* life would immediately wither.'⁷¹

Even when all the literary groups were disbanded and the Writers' Union formed, Brik continued to argue in favour of what he defined as 'creative union' against the pejorative 'coterie'. Writers who share common aesthetic views need to nourish one another – the absence of such groupings will only result in alienation and individualism, and will create the illusion 'that all the problems of creative work have already been solved or are being solved by some kind of authoritative commissions'.⁷²

Roman Jakobson points out in his recollections that Brik's actual contribution to the Formalist study of literature was more significant than the small number of his publications might suggest. ('Sound Repetitions', 1916, and 'Rhythm and Syntaxis', *Novy Lef*, 1927, no 3 – 6.) Many of his works to which Jakobson refers with high praise, remained unfinished. Still more important was his unstinting contribution to the collective work of Opoyaz:

'He liked to cope with an intricate problem, then to recount his results, and felt quite happy if his listeners were ready to develop and utilise them, while he himself could go over to a new, unexplored domain.'⁷³

The influence of his far reaching criticism was also acknowledged in the works of former colleagues like Zhirmunsky and Eikhenbaum. The only thing, Jakobson adds, which prevented Brik from becoming a widely known professional scholar was his total lack of personal ambition.

There must have been yet another reason – Brik's exclusive commitment to social demand rather than academic studies. From the early days of the Revolution Brik directed all his energy and imagination to those areas of 'cultural life' which he considered most important for the revolution: organisation of museums and art schools during the years of IZO Narkompros, lectures and debates on art and revolution, posters and propaganda material for 'TASS Windows'⁷⁴ during the Second World War.

When Brik was invited in the twenties to enliven the work of the agit-theatre 'Blue Blouse', which was to perform political sketches in places like pubs, he responded to this task with all the fervour and inventiveness of a true Futurist.

A friend in Moscow told me how once, in the late thirties, when all the turbulence and ardent polemics of *Lef* were relegated to the past, he came across a newspaper item criticising the Moscow laundry service. The biting wit and precision of its author was unmistakable – the item was signed Osip Brik. He was still a protagonist of 'literature of fact'.

Brik never repudiated his views and, unlike many of his former colleagues, he never recanted his 'errors'. The two articles which appear in this issue – 'Imo-Art of the Young' (1940) and 'Mayakovsky and the Literary Movements, 1917-1930' (1936) – despite their moderate tone, are rather an attempt to salvage the past and record it for future generations than a critical reappraisal. They appeared in the general wave of literature on Mayakovsky which followed Stalin's pronouncement in the mid-thirties: 'Mayakovsky is the best, the most gifted poet of our Soviet epoch'. Along with the heartfelt recollections of people like Eikhenbaum and Kamensky, and Aseev's poem 'Mayakovsky begins', there appeared articles and treatises determined to prove that Mayakovsky had never been a 'Futurist', to divorce 'the best and most gifted' from his 'accidental' companions. It is in this context that Brik's articles should be read.

Of the other works which appear in this issue, the unrealised script 'Thieves' and recollections of Khlebnikov, have never been published in Russian. 'From the Theory and Practice of a Script Writer' was published in a collection of articles *How We Work on Film Scenarios* in 1936.

Notes

1. Victor Shklovsky, *Zhili-byli*, Moscow, 1964, p 372.
2. The Cheka or Vecheka – the initials of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-revolution, Sabotage and Speculation set up in December, 1917.
3. *Izobrazitelnoe Iskusstvo*. IZO Narkompros, Petersburg, no. 1, 1919, p 86.
4. Quoted by Shklovsky, *op cit*, p 81.
5. A Kruchenykh, 'Novye puti slova', *Troe*, Moscow, 1914.
6. Shklovsky, *op cit*, p 223.
7. See Camilla Gray, *The Russian Experiment in Art*, London, 1971, Chapters 4-6.
8. Shklovsky, *op cit*, p 230.
9. The reciprocal tendencies can be observed in painting and book design of the time, which tried to give graphic equivalents to poetic images. Many of the avant-garde artists gravitated to literature and wrote poetry. See: N Khardzhiev 'Mayakovsky i zhivopis', *Mayakovsky. Materialy i issledovaniya*, Moscow, 1940.
10. A Kruchenykh, V Khlebnikov, *Word as Such*, Moscow, 1913, p 13.
11. The name is frequently used to designate the whole movement in

contra-distinction to Ego-Futurism, the Petersburg faction led by Igor Severyanin and Vadim Shershenevich. See Vladimir Markov, *Russian Futurism*, London, 1969.

12. A Kruchenykh, *Word as Such*, *op cit*.
13. Symbolist aesthetics valued the poetic word not for what it was, but for what it suggested
14. Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism. History – Doctrine*, 3rd ed. The Hague – Paris, 1969.
15. Boris Eikhenbaum, *Literatura*, Leningrad, 1927, p 120; quoted by Victor Erlich, *op cit*, p 71.
16. *Sborniki po teorii poeticheskogo yazyka*, I, 1916 and II, 1917, Petersburg.
17. *Mayakovsky and his Poetry*, compiled by Herbert Marshall, London, 1942, p 26.
18. Lilya Brik recalled this episode later: 'His reading was fascinating. It was what we had been waiting for. We had not been able to read anything for some time. All poetry seemed worthless – poets were writing not in the right way and not about the right things, and here suddenly was both.' 'Iz vospominany', *Al'manakh s Mayakovskim*, Moscow, 1934.

19a. Vasily Kamensky, *Yunost' Mayakovskogo*, Tiflis, 1931, p 67.

- b. It is worth noting that the stimulating atmosphere of 'the evenings at Brik's flat', which in later years was turned into the editorial office of *Lef*, owed a great deal to the attractive personality of the hostess. Much of what was going on, the specialised theoretical discussions or the painstaking technical analysis of the verse, never concerned her. But she passionately loved poetry, knew all of Mayakovsky's by heart, and was a very keen and appreciative listener. She had a peculiar charm and talents of her own: inimitable taste in arranging her home and offering unobtrusive hospitality, which made one feel at ease and disposed to talk. She related to the outside world through the men who surrounded her. But she has always been a devoted and faithful friend to them, and deserves to be mentioned with greater respect and fairness than is frequently done by literary historians. Mayakovsky's love for Lilya Brik became part of his literary biography. The fact that Lilya and Osip Brik never separated, and the unbiased genuine friendship that united the two men is hardly a reason for dubbing their relationship a 'ménage à trois' This is how Lilya herself described their union:

'When I told my husband that Mayakovsky and I had fallen in love, the three of us decided never to part. Mayakovsky and Brik had already been close friends, united by their ideological beliefs and common literary work. And so it happened that we lived all our life together, close in spirit, and most of the time sharing the same flat.'

Literaturnoe Nasledstvo, v 65, *Novoe o Mayakovskom*, Moscow, 1958, p 101.

20. *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, v 65, *Novoe o Mayakovskom*, Moscow, 1958, p 543, quoted by Wiktor Woroszyński, *The Life of Mayakovsky*, London, 1972, p 175.
21. E H Dinerstein, 'Mayakovsky v fevrale-oktyabre 1917', *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, *op cit*, p 567 n.
22. *Ibid*, p 546-547, quoted by Woroszyński, *op cit*, p 175, 176, 177.
23. The February Revolution of 1917 in Russia was followed by the period of the so-called 'dual power', when the authority was divided between the Provisional Government, the legal successor of the Tsarist Government, and the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers'

- Deputies, created by the spontaneous action of Petrograd workers and dominated at that time by the Mensheviks.
24. Russian Parliament.
 25. Punin's report quoted by Dinerstein, *op cit*, p 564. See also Brik's articles in this issue.
 26. *Ibid*, p 548.
 27. Dinerstein, *op cit*, p 548.
 28. 'To accept or not to accept? For me (as for the other Moscow Futurists) this question never arose. It is my revolution. Went to Smolny. Worked. Did everything that came my way.' 'I Myself', *Mayakovsky and his Poetry*, *op cit*, p 27. See also the testimonials of B F Malkin and M Y Levidov, quoted by Dinerstein, *op cit*, p 563, 569.
 29. Lunacharsky's letter is quoted by Woroszylski, *op cit*, p 187.
 30. Quoted by Dinerstein, *op cit*, p 566. (See also Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment*, Cambridge, 1970, Chapter 6, 'The Arts')
 31. *Ibid*, p 566.
 32. Commissar for the former Imperial Palace Ministry under the Provisional Government.
 33. Quoted by Dinerstein, *op cit*, p 566.
 34. Initially the Petersburg collegium consisted of the following artists and art critics: Punin, Altman, Matveev, Karev, Vaulin, Chekhonin and Yatmanov. Later they were joined by the architects: Il'in, Dubenetsky, Rudnev, Stalberg, Shchuko, artists Baranov-Rossine, Shkolnik.
 35. Quoted by Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment*, Cambridge, 1970, p 123.
 36. *Ibid*, p 123.
 37. From Petrograd IZO statement, *Ibid*, p 123.
 38. From the Shterenberg article, 'To the critics from Proletkult', *Art of the Commune*, no 10, 1919, *Ibid*, p 123.
 39. See chapter 'The Art of the Commune' in Woroszylski, *op cit*, p 242.
 40. *Art of the Commune*, no 4, December 29, 1918.
 41. Lebedev-Polyansky, 'Revolution and the Cultural Tasks of Proletkult', *Proletarskaya kul'tura*, no 2, July 1918.
 42. *Art of the Commune*, no 1, December 7, 1918.
 43. Osip Brik, 'The Artist and the Commune', *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo*, no. 1, 1919.
 44. *Osliny Khvost i Mishen'*, Moscow, 1919, quoted by Camilla Gray, *op cit*, p 137.
 45. Larionov and Zdanevich, quoted by Khardzhiev, 'Mayakovsky i zhivopis', *op cit*, p 376.
 46. *The Futurist Paper*, March 15, 1918, quoted by Woroszylski, *op cit*, p 194.
 47. Walter Gropius, *Idee und Aufbau des staatlichen Bauhauses*, Weimar and Munich, 1923.
 48. 'Creation of Life', *Art of the Commune*, no 5, January 5, 1919.
 49. See Camilla Gray, *op cit*, pp 234-235.
 50. See 'Institut khudozhestvennoi kul'tury' in *Russkoe iskusstvo*, 1923, no 2-3, pp 85-88; I Matsa, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za pyatnadtsat' let*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1933; L Zhadova, 'O teorii sovetskogo dizaina dvadtsatkykh godov' in *Voprosy tekhnicheskoi estetiki*, vol 1, Moscow, 1968.
 51. See D Sarabryanov, *Aleksei Vasil'evich Babichev, Khudozhnik Teoretik Pedagog*, Moscow, 1974.
 52. 'From Picture to Calico-print', *Lef*, no 2 (6), 1924, English trans-

- lation, *Screen*, v 12 n 4, Winter 1971/2, p 48 (now out of print).
53. *Art of the Commune*, no 4, December 29, 1918.
 54. O Brik, 'On the agenda', *Iskusstvo v proizvodstve*, Moscow, 1921.
 55. '... a work of art is perceived against a background of, and by means of association with, other works of art. The form of the work of art is determined by the relation to other forms existing before it. . . . A new form appears not in order to express a new content, but in order to replace an old form, which has already lost its artistic value. . . .' Victor Shklovsky, 'The connection between devices of *syuzhet* construction and general stylistic devices' (1919), in *20th Century Studies*, December 7/8, 1972, the University of Kent, Canterbury, p 53.
 56. 'V chem krizis?', *Ezhenedel'nik tsentral'nogo doma rabotnikov iskusstv*, 1922, no 1.
 57. Shunning psychological and sociological considerations, the Formalists were apt to regard literary production as a special type of technical expertise. This is reflected in the very titles of their work, eg Eikhenbaum's 'How Gogol's "Overcoat" is made', Shklovsky's 'How Don Quixote is made'. 'The literary work of art is always something made, shaped, invented – not only artful, but artificial in the good sense of the word'. Eikhenbaum, 'Kak sdelana "Shinel" Gogolya', *Poetica*, Petrograd, 1919, p 161, quoted by Victor Erlich, *op cit*, p 190.
 58. 'Aesthetic Criminality', *Ermitazh*, 1922, no 2.
 59. *How are Verses Made*, English translation by G M Hyde, London, 1970, pp 56, 57.
 60. The notion of 'making strange' and 'art as a device', introduced by Shklovsky in 1919, became key terms of the Formalist study of literature: 'What is called art exists in order to restore man's sensation of life, to make him perceive things, to make a stone stony. The aim of art is to impart the sensation of things as seen and not merely recognised; the device which art uses is the device of "making things strange" and of complicating the form, thereby increasing the difficulty and length of perception, so that the perceiving process becomes an end in itself and has to be prolonged. Art is a means of experiencing the making of a thing: what is made in art is unimportant'. 'Art as a Device', *Poetica*, *op cit*, p 105. English translation in *Russian Formalist Criticism, Four Essays*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1965.
 61. Mayakovsky and Brik, 'Our literary work', *Lef*, no 1, p 41, English translation *Screen* v 12 n 4, Winter 1971/2. (Now out of print.)
 62. *Lef*, no 1, 1923, English translation *Screen*, v 12 n 4, Winter 1971/2.
 63. 'The subject of literary scholarship is not literature in its totality, but literariness (*literaturnost'*), ie that which makes of a given work a work of literature. . . . If literary history wants to become a science, it must recognise the artistic device as its only concern.' Roman Jakobson, *Noveishaya russkaya poeziya*, Prague, 1921, p 11, quoted by Victor Erlich, *op cit*, pp 172, 77.
 64. Quoted by Victor Erlich, *op cit*, p 105.
 65. P S Kogan, *Pechat' i revolyutsiya*, 1922, no 2; *Izvestiya VTSIK*, 1922, no 166; Sergei Bobrov, *Krasnaya nov'*, 1922, no 1, quoted by Eikhenbaum, 'Vokrug voprosa o "formalistakh"', *Pechat' i revolyutsiya*, 1924, no 5.
 66. L Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, Moscow, 1923, English translation, The University of Michigan Press, 1968.
 67. 'The So-called Formal Method', *op cit*.
 68. The literary magazine of VAPP (All-Union Association of Proletarian Writers), see Glossary.

- 58 69. *Pechat' i Revolutsiya*, 1929, no 1, p 37.
70. In a letter to Osip Mandel'shtam, January 31, 1925, *Voprosy Literaturny*, 1972, no 9, p 161.
71. *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, 1925, no 1, p 94.
72. 'In favour of creative unions', *Literaturny kritik*, 1934, no 5, p 158.
73. Roman Jakobson, Postscript to *Two Essays on Poetic Language* by O M Brik, Michigan Slavic Materials, no 5, Ann Arbor, p 78.
74. Soviet Press Agency.

Osip Brik

This article brings together factual data and documents (articles, declarations, etc) connected with the editorial and literary-organisational work of Vladimir Mayakovsky; the documents are accompanied by brief commentaries re-establishing the actual context of the times in which they were produced.

From the outset of his writing career, and particularly since 1918, Mayakovsky's literary practice outstripped his literary-theoretical views, conflicting with them to an ever-increasing extent. As we know, this circumstance was to lead to the dissolution of *Lef* and to Mayakovsky's entry into the Association of Proletarian Writers.

It was Mayakovsky's literary work which made him the greatest figure of Soviet poetry, not his theoretical pronouncements. In fact these pronouncements can only be properly understood in the light of his creative practice; it is this which demonstrates – better than any commentary – the error of the position Mayakovsky assumed even before the Revolution, and underlines those correct, intrinsic tendencies which were to develop in the years of his post-revolutionary work.

A knowledge of the course of Mayakovsky's literary-theoretical development is nevertheless extremely important. On the one hand such knowledge contributes towards a clearer understanding of his creative work (particularly in the first years of the Revolution). On the other hand many aspects of the development of Soviet literature and the complexities and contradictions of that development are sharply reflected in the path followed by Mayakovsky.

This article represents material towards a literary biography and makes no further claims than that. The full biography will need to break down this material in the context of the main task – the analysis of Mayakovsky's literary works.

I

In mid-November 1917, the Commissar of Education, A V Lunarcharsky, appealed to the members of the Artists' Union to start working together for the creation of new forms of artistic life and cultural enlightenment.

The Artists' Union, which at that time united people from the most diverse artistic tendencies and movements, discussed the Commissar's appeal at their first meeting.

Prior to this the question had been fiercely debated in the numerous factions and groupings which made up the Union. Discussion at the meeting of the 'left bloc', constituted by the most

60 ultra-left artists, had been particularly heated.

The sharpness of the debate centred on the fact that Lunarcharsky was the representative of government authority while the 'left bloc' was categorically opposed to government intervention in artistic life and for 'the separation of art from the State'.

The 'left bloc' argued that only a 'constituent assembly' of all artists was empowered to decide questions which bore on the organisation of the nation's artistic life. Whatever the political sympathies of individual artists, art was essentially 'a-political and free'.

One member of the left bloc put forward the following uncompromising resolution:

'Commissar Lunarcharsky's appeal is vague on the question of government attitude to the autonomy of art; it forces the contemporary left movement into passive acquiescence with withered academicism and the bureaucrats of art. With this appeal to the Artists' Union, Lunarcharsky is openly undermining the beginnings of the only currently correct attempt to build our future artistic life – that propagated by the left tendencies in art – and is handing over power to the outdated and irresponsible "custodians" of art. Given this, we, the bloc of left tendencies in art, are making our own appeal to the people – through the left bloc manifesto on the tasks and attitudes bearing on the development of our future artistic life.'

The proposed resolution did not meet with a sympathetic reception. And after lengthy debate the meeting passed a brief resolution which, though more modest, was no less firm in its defence of 'constitutional rights'.

'Having listened to Comrade Lunarcharsky's appeal, the Artists' Union informs him that they have already taken measures to call a constituent assembly of all artists which will express to the people directly the organised view of the art world on the task of developing the artistic life of the nation.'

This resolution was utterly diplomatic – it avoided an outright rejection and at the same time carried the reference to a constituent assembly.

On November 17/30* Lunarcharsky's appeal was discussed at a plenary meeting of the Artists' Union. The majority of those who spoke voiced – some aggressively, some in milder terms – a categorical protest against the 'Bolsheviks' seizure of power over art', and a call to battle for the autonomy of artistic life.

Only one of those present, Vladimir Mayakovsky, took the floor

* Russia changed from the Julian to the Gregorian (Western) calendar on February 14, 1918, which became February 1, new style. Brik here gives the date in old and new style.

to say that 'we must welcome the new power and open up relations with it'.

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In those days Mayakovsky saw very clearly that only the power of the victorious proletariat could ensure the existence and development of a genuine art, that no sham 'constituent assemblies' could draw art out of the mire into which it had been led by the bourgeoisie.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude from this that the full complexity of the enormous tasks which confronted Soviet Power where the organisation of the nation's artistic life was concerned was understood immediately and completely by Mayakovsky.

Artists did not respond as a body to the Commissar's appeal. At the conference called by Lunarcharsky it became apparent that artists were ready to work only on condition that the organisation of the art field was independent of the Soviets of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants' Deputies. A resolution drawn up beforehand and passed by the majority of the meeting limited the form of that organisation to 'an autonomous union of all artists', while the government authorities were assigned a purely supervisory role with, of course, the responsibility of feeding that 'autonomous organisation' financially.

But individual artists did respond to the Commissar's appeal. Among them were the ultra 'left' artists, and first and foremost, Mayakovsky. Even before the Revolution, Mayakovsky had been a convinced and uncompromising enemy of capitalist society. For him therefore the question of whether or not to accept Soviet Power did not arise. He saw in that power liberation from a gross and unjust life, protest against which permeates all his pre-revolutionary work. At the same time, he saw Soviet Power as the force which could and must overthrow the power of 'old aesthetic junk'.

There was an important truth in this – the striving to free art from senile academicism, to restore it to its full-blooded, living strength. But there were many erroneous aspects to Mayakovsky's aesthetic position, the chief of which was his misunderstanding of Lenin's attitude to the cultural heritage.

However, it was not just 'left' artists who started working under the direction of the Soviets. The ranks included A Benois and Count P Zubov who saw in the Soviet government a power capable of preserving the cultural treasures and artistic monuments of the past.

The encounter with his sworn 'enemies' in the office of the revolutionary People's Commissar was totally bewildering to Mayakovsky. His ardent Futurist proposals met with a sharp rebuff from the side of the 'preservers of old junk'. And the revolutionary Commissar Lunarcharsky listened more attentively to the advice of Benois on the organisation of museums than to Mayakovsky's 'arch-revolutionary' onslaughts.

This was the start of practical solutions to the extremely complex question of the relationship between the cultural heritage and the newly-created socialist culture. In the first days of Soviet Power, the problem posed itself with all its difficulties and contradictions, and it is not surprising that Mayakovsky was unable to find the correct solution for himself at this stage.

Mayakovsky continued his Futurist battle against the aesthetic heritage produced by centuries of human history, failing to understand that that heritage was now the property of the revolutionary proletariat, regardless of who had produced it and whose needs it had fulfilled. Mayakovsky failed to see that the proletariat was not just the creator of a new form of human culture, but also the legitimate heir to all the cultural riches produced by preceding epochs.

In the fervour of his Futurism, Mayakovsky stuck completely to pre-revolutionary positions when he fought the old aesthetic traditions for the right to be a rebel-innovator. He failed to see that the October Revolution had swept away all previous positions and shifted the battle line to quite a different area.

The persistence of the Futurist mentality showed itself immediately. In March 1918 (together with D Burlyuk and V Kamen-sky) Mayakovsky brought out 'The Futurist Paper'* in Moscow; and in its pages, the fruits of empty anarcho-syndicalism flourished vigorously alongside ardent calls for the creation of a new art.

The paper carried an 'Open letter to the workers' signed by Mayakovsky, and a 'Decree on the democratisation of the Arts' in the elaboration of which Mayakovsky had been closely involved.

These articles give some indication of the enormous distance Mayakovsky was to cover in freeing himself from the petty-bourgeois, anarchistic views of culture which initially prevented him arriving at a full understanding of the essential nature and tasks of the proletarian revolution.

But in these naive and erroneous statements of 1918, it is already possible to discern the factor which, in its continuing development, was to lead Mayakovsky away from an aestheticist 'leftism' and make him the greatest of Soviet poets. I have in mind his indefatigable hatred of capitalism, his dedication to the cause of the liberation of the proletariat, his struggle towards a full democratisation of art, towards its mergence with the revolutionary reconstruction of the life of society.

II

The problem of organising the cultural life of the country had two aspects – on the one hand the question was to create new art works and provide for the living artist, and on the other, to

* For a more detailed account of this publication see the article 'IMO – Art of the Young' in this issue.

preserve artistic and historical monuments and assimilate the cultural heritage; these found their external expression in the organisation of two departments within the Commissariat of Education – the arts department and the department of museums and the protection of monuments of the past.

The head of the arts department was the painter D P Shterenberg who had returned from political emigration in 1918. Around him had gathered those leftist artists who saw in the organisation of the arts department a chance to resume the fight for new art inside the Commissariat of Education.

Militant clashes with the museums department soon broke out. Battles flared up over every conceivable issue: the allocation of exhibition halls, the purchase of art works, the composition of competition juries, and so on. A typical exchange took place between N Altman, a member of the arts department charged with the organisation of an exhibition of contemporary paintings in the Hermitage, and A Benois, the director and conservator of the Hermitage. Benois absolutely refused to open the rooms of the Hermitage to the exhibition on the pretext that he was worried about the safety of the museum's exhibits. Altman persisted, basing his claims on the authority which had been entrusted to him. In the heat of argument, Benois shouted: 'You must understand, I am responsible to history!' To which Altman calmly responded: 'Well you're alright – you're responsible to history, but I have to answer to the Narkompros'.

In autumn 1918, Mayakovsky joined the collegium of the arts department, having realised that the fight for new art could only be waged within the organisational framework of the Soviet government, not through high-sounding 'manifestos', 'decrees' and 'declarations', addressed to the people directly.

It must be borne in mind that Mayakovsky's literary practice in those years was markedly closer to the aims and tasks of the socialist revolution than were his politico-aesthetic ideas. At that time Mayakovsky was already writing his play *Mystery-Bouffe* and planning his poem *150,000,000*. But he was as yet unwilling and unable to break away from propaganda for Futurism as an artistic movement.

Mayakovsky obtained Lunarcharsky's permission to issue a small anthology of Futurism. It appeared under the title *The Unsifted Word*, in a cover designed by Mayakovsky. The cover was marked 'Imo, Fontanka 5, Flat 2'. Imo signified 'the Art of the Young' (Iskusstvo Molodykh). But of course no such publishing organisation existed. This was simply the publishing 'pseudonym' of Mayakovsky and a group of friends, like the imprint 'Asis' (Association of Socialist Art [Assotsiyatsiya Sotsialisticheskogo Iskusstva]) which figured on Mayakovsky's earlier published poems *Cloud in Trousers* and *Man*. In the same year, 1918, the first edition of *Mystery-Bouffe* appeared under the 'Imo' imprint.

64 Mayakovsky compiled *The Unsifted Word*; 'A revolutionary Futurist anthology' from the verse of Aseyev, D Burluk, V Kamensk Khlebnikov and his own work (*Our March, Revolution, and a* extract from *War and the Universe*). He also wrote an editorial foreword to the work entitled 'Everyone should read this book

Lunarcharsky felt it necessary to send in his own short foreword to *The Unsifted Word* in which he set out the ideas which led him to agree to the publication of a Futurist anthology.

Foreword

In the present difficult period writers are often deprived of an opportunity to publish their works.

In former times these difficulties were most often encountered by revolutionary writers; not just those who expressed revolutionary ideas in their works, but also those who strove to revolutionise form and worked against established systems.

The worker and peasant state has now, to an ever-increasing extent, to take on the publication of literary works by whatever means available – directly through the state publishing house, through the publishing organisations of the Soviets, or by means of subsidies (to private publishers).

And clearly, its accepted principle must be to give the mass reader fresh and new access to everything. It is better to make the mistake of offering the people something they cannot respond to sympathetically, either now or later, than to keep back (on the grounds that it doesn't suit certain tastes at the moment) a work that is rich in future potential.

*For this reason the Commissariat of Education was glad to help with the publication of *The Unsifted Word*. The book is written by Futurists. Attitudes to them vary and they can be criticised on many grounds. But they are young, and youth is revolutionary. . . . No wonder then that their defiant, striking, if occasionally eccentric, art radiates the kind of power, daring and breadth we hold dear. Mayakovsky's verse rings out with many notes which no revolutionary young in body or spirit will listen to unmoved.*

Let the worker read and judge everything – the old and the new. We will not impose anything on him; we will, however, show him everything.

A Lunarcharsky.

This foreword is extremely characteristic of Lunarcharsky's position at that time.

A convinced partisan and propagandist of realism, Lunarcharsky followed the development of new artistic groups with the greatest attention and while allowing complete freedom to 'left' or 'right', he tried to promote all that was talented in them or capable of evolving towards a Soviet mass art.

Later, when Soviet literature had strengthened its position

while still maintaining his principle of freedom for the various artistic tendencies, Lunarcharsky expressed his opposition to the formally 'left' artists in sharper terms. Nevertheless, he always distinguished Mayakovsky's creative work from his literary-theoretical views and from the work of those writers in the 'left' groups who were substituting the so-called 'revolution in form' for revolutionary content.

III

Having become a member of the collegium of the arts department, Mayakovsky took an active part in the work of developing the artistic life of the country. The agendas of the collegium meetings which have been preserved witness to the fact that Mayakovsky participated in discussions of the innumerable extremely complex problems that arose in the department. Artists had to be drawn into the work of the revolution, courses had to be set up at the art colleges, artists had to be materially provided for, and dozens of other such pressing questions had to be dealt with daily by the collegium. Other kinds of problems cropped up in the area of the adjacent arts – industrial art, illustrated publications, cinema, the theatre. There too Mayakovsky did not stand on the sidelines – he made suggestions and took part verbally and practically in organisational work.

For all that, Mayakovsky never for a moment lost sight of the fact that the institutional framework of artistic life had to have a real content. It was not enough to draw in artists, they had to be persuaded to work in response to the demands dictated by the interests of the socialist revolution. For Mayakovsky, those interests coincided with the aims and tasks of revolutionary-innovatory art.

As a way of propagandising that art and fighting the dominance of decaying aesthetic canons, a group of collegium members headed by Mayakovsky initiated the paper *The Art of the Commune* – the organ of the arts department of Narkompros. The first issue came out early in December 1918.

In the pages of *The Art of the Commune*, Mayakovsky published his well-known poems *Left March* and *Stunning Facts*, both pointedly revolutionary in theme; he also published a series of poems on militantly polemical themes: *Order to the Army of Art*, *We are Moving, Too Early to Rejoice*, *To the Other Side*, *Poet-Worker*, *Comradely Greetings from Mayakovsky*. In these poems Mayakovsky threw the whole weight of his poetic attack against the zealots of 'academy-junk' and against the proletkultists* who gave way to its influence.

The aggressive tone and direction of *The Art of the Commune*, and most particularly of Mayakovsky's poems, soon sparked off a sharp conflict within Narkompros between the arts department

* See glossary.

and the museums department. The inevitability of the conflict also stemmed from the fact that among the museum workers, old theatre workers, and so on, there were quite a number of people politically hostile to the Soviet government, for whom the preservation of the monuments of the old culture was just a convenient way of sabotaging that government's revolutionary measures. Mayakovsky hated these people and used every opportunity he had to expose them. In response they raised a hue and cry over Mayakovsky's destruction of culture, basing their attack on the 'trans-sense' extremes of which there were more than enough examples in the pronouncements of the Futurists. The situation was extremely complicated. There were exaggerations and errors on both sides which confused things even more.

Mayakovsky's poem *Too Early to Rejoice* served as a concrete occasion for conflict: in it Mayakovsky voices a call to 'gun down old trash with the canon of our throats'. To that firing squad were led such members of the 'White Guard' as Rafael, Rastrelli, Pushkin and other 'generals of the classics'.

The heads of the museums department quite rightly saw in this poem – which was published in the Narkompros paper – a dangerous appeal to violence which could easily exceed the bounds of 'the canon of our throats'.

Moreover, the whole orientation of the poem was in definite contradiction to the basic Narkompros principle on the assimilation of the artistic heritage.

The heads of the museums department expressed a vigorous protest to the People's Commissar, and Lunarcharsky was obliged to call a special meeting to settle the conflict.

With his characteristic openness and good humour Anatoly Vasil'evich Lunarcharsky at once saw that both sides were extremely overheated. He listened to the fiery speeches of the opponents, and promised to produce a clarificatory article, which was in fact published in the next issue of *The Art of the Commune* under the title 'A Spoonful of Antidote'.

With fine irony, Lunarcharsky smoothed agitated public opinion, showing that the Futurists were not the terrible people they made themselves out to be. He pointed to one of their number in particular who, despite his Futurist ardour, was a great scholar and lover of ancient Russian iconography. He moreover reminded people that 'the Futurists were the first to enlist their support for the Revolution, of all intellectuals, they were the closest and most sympathetic to it. And they have revealed their organisational abilities in many spheres of work.'

However, Lunarcharsky too found it necessary to note that he feared two traits in 'the young face of the paper' – the destructive tendency in relation to the past, and the desire to speak for authority when it spoke on behalf of a particular artistic school.

Lunarcharsky was of course right. But it was difficult for Maya-

kovsky to dampen his fighting spirit and realise fully that the tasks and aims of the cultural growth of the Soviet nation were immeasurably more important and vital than the particular questions of artistic polemics. This of course does not mean that Mayakovsky was wrong to fight for a new revolutionary art – that had to be fought for. Mayakovsky's error and the error of the whole group was the failure to understand the place of that struggle in the overall cultural struggle. They had an exaggerated view of their revolutionary role, and tended to consider their strip of the battle line the most important. Hence the loss of perspective and the crude blunders.

In the spring of 1919, Mayakovsky moved to Moscow and his links with the arts department were broken. *The Art of the Commune* went out of existence soon afterwards. The composition of the collegium changed. The group which had formed around him broke up.

IV

During the whole of 1919 and 1920, Mayakovsky worked tirelessly in agit and propaganda on both the external and internal fronts of the Civil War. This was that remarkable period in his literary biography when he unhesitatingly gave 'the attacking class all his resounding poet's strength', and when in his day to day revolutionary work through verse he underwent a political schooling which prepared him for the high rank of poet of the Soviet epoch. It would be no exaggeration to say that this was a turning point in Mayakovsky's development.

During these years Mayakovsky had no time for literary-artistic disputes. He occasionally engaged in public propaganda for left-revolutionary art, but this was not his main concern. Literary battles were far too minor by comparison with the great struggles of the Civil War.

Only towards the end of 1921 did Mayakovsky once again begin thinking about the possibility of giving organisational shape to the workers in left art.

In the first instance the question was one of opportunities for publishing 'our own' works – that is, the works of the members of the group.

Publishing opportunities in that period were extremely limited, Gosizdat could barely cope with the enormous tasks imposed upon it. And of course Mayakovsky would under no circumstances have published with the private publishing houses still in existence then. Their political physiognomy was repellent enough to deter him.

It would have been far preferable to find some 'honest' contractor who would for reasons of pure profit agree to print books for the Soviet market. Such a man was in fact found in Riga and Mayakovsky discussed with Lunarcharsky the possibility of implementing this kind of publishing plan. Lunarcharsky fully

68 approved the idea and suggested that Mayakovsky present him with a memorandum on the subject together with a list of proposed books.

The memorandum was presented at once. It stated that 'We are organising MAF (The Moscow – later International/Mezhdunarodnaya/ – Association of Futurists) – a publishing body for left art. The aim of this body is to publish a journal, anthologies, monographs, collected works, text books, and so on, devoted to propagandising the foundations of future communist art and presenting what has been achieved along that path.'

To the memorandum was attached a list of titles of first priority, including among others an illustrated journal of MAF art, anthologies of Mayakovsky's verse, a book on the Russian poster, Pasternak's lyrics, an anthology of the newest literature, a collection of articles on production art.

Anatoly Lunarcharsky read the memorandum and the list of proposed titles and appended his decision: 'I find the idea of such a publishing body acceptable. I request that the books be passed for import, on condition that the relevant regulations are observed'.

Of course nothing came of all this planning. The 'honest' capitalist soon realised with what and whom he was dealing and what's more, that the possibility of large profits was highly unlikely. The transaction never took place.

But the idea of creating a MAF publishing organisation was not abandoned. Mayakovsky began looking for other possibilities. He found them in the typographical department of Vkhutemas (Vsesoyznye Khudozhestvenno-tekhnicheskie Masterskie – All-Soviet Studios of Art and Design).

Mayakovsky reached an agreement with the head of the institution that books would be printed in the trainee typographical department and Mayakovsky would obtain the essential materials and means from Gosizdat as advance payments for the edition.

This plan was simpler and Mayakovsky succeeded in printing and presenting Gosizdat with several of the proposed books.

The MAF publishing organisation brought out Mayakovsky's poem *I Love*, his collection of verses entitled *Mayakovsky Mocks* and a collection of Aseyev's verse, *The Steel Nightingale*. At the same time and under the same arrangement Mayakovsky published his two-volume collected works *13 Years' Work* through Vkhutemas. The MAF printing organisation had no further developments after this.

V

The transition from the period of war communism to the New Economic Policy produced an extremely complex economic-political situation in the country. The socialist revolution entered on a new stage of its development.

The situation on the cultural construction front, and in the literary sector in particular, also proved rather complex.

Re-awakened petty bourgeois forces, including all kinds of non-Soviet and anti-Soviet elements, took NEP as some kind of 'freedom charter' and invaded literature in an attempt to consolidate their existence under cover of 'the artistic image'.

In the spring of 1921, *Krasnaya Nov'* (*Red Virgin Soil*) – a journal devoted to literature, art and the social sciences – was launched. The object was to concentrate Soviet literary forces around the publication and to draw in those open to sovieticisation, pruning off the non-Soviet elements.

Simultaneously with the establishment of *Krasnaya Nov'*, the critical-bibliographical journal *Pechat' i Revoliutsiya* (Press and Revolution) was set up with roughly similar aims.

These two magazines played a major role in building the literary life of the nation. They succeeded in attracting and uniting around themselves a considerable number of talented writers and critics, thereby strengthening the position of Soviet literature in its struggle with its political and ideological enemies.

Nevertheless, the activities of these two magazines were not comprehensive enough to embrace all the problems which Soviet literature raised in the course of its development. In autumn 1922 a conflict began to gather to a head which was to evoke a lengthy literary dispute, organisational regrouping and bitter polemics, and which was only resolved in mid-1925 with the famous resolution of the Russian Communist Party's Central Committee 'On Party policy in the field of literature' published in *Pravda* no 147, July 1, 1925.

Krasnaya Nov', in its concern to draw repentant internal and external emigrés into Soviet literature overlooked the growth of new *cadres* of Soviet literature from within the revolutionary worker and peasant youth. It paid them too little attention and failed to recognise in their first efforts the birth of a qualitatively new literature. That youth had elbowed its way onto the back seats of *Krasnaya Nov'*, worn smooth by the 'venerable figures' of literature and was now looking for its own framework; they united into the October group out of which VAPP was later to grow. On the other hand, the editorship paid too little attention to the small but active group of artist-intellectuals who did not need 'drawing in', who had long worked in the ranks of the revolutionary proletariat. At the head of that group stood Mayakovsky.

Like the October group, Mayakovsky was dissatisfied with the a-political 'literary-art' position of *Krasnaya Nov'*. They accused the editorship of giving way to the influence of those it had attracted and instead of re-aligning them, re-aligning itself in their direction.

At the end of 1922, Mayakovsky presented the agit section of the Central Committee with a request for permission to publish

70 the journal *Lef*. He attached an editorial outline of the journal which formulated the object of the publication as follows (I quote from the surviving rough draft):

*To the Agit Section of the Central Committee
of the Russian Communist Party*

Editorial outline of the journal Lef

1. Why we need to publish our own journal:

The extreme revolutionary movements in art do not have their own organ – since the official organs like Krasnaya Nov' for example are not exclusively concerned with art and devote little space to it.

2. We cannot obtain private capital for the organisation of our journal since we are ideologically a communist group.

3. Aims of the journal:

- (a) The aim of the journal is to enable us to find a communist direction for all forms of art.*
- (b) To review the ideology and practice of so-called left art, rejecting its individualistic distortions and developing its valuable, communist aspects.*
- (c) To carry out vigorous agit work within production art in favour of the adoption of a communist direction and ideology.*
- (d) To bring in the most revolutionary movements in the art field and serve as an avant-garde for both Russian and world art.*
- (e) To familiarise the Russian workers' audience with the achievements of European art as represented not by its canonised and official figures, but by the young writers and artists who, while rejected by the European bourgeoisie, in themselves represent the beginnings of a new proletarian culture.*
- (f) To fight by all available means against conciliators in the art field who are substituting the old, outworn phraseology of absolute values and eternal beauties for communist ideology in the sphere of art.*
- (g) To give examples of literary and artistic works not in order to indulge aesthetic tastes, but to indicate devices for the creation of effective agit works.*
- (h) To fight against decadence, against aesthetic mysticism, self-satisfied formalism, and uncommitted naturalism, for the affirmation of a partisan realism based on the use of the technical devices of all revolutionary schools of art.*

At this time Mayakovsky had already attained the stature of a great poet and publicist, who in his work was able to combine a high level of skill with a correct political orientation. The great political esteem which Lenin accorded his poem *Re Meetings*,

printed in *Izvestiya* (March 1922) is the best proof of this.

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Approval was granted for the publication of the journal *Lef* and passed to Gosizdat for implementation.

Mayakovsky now began active preparations for his work of editing the journal. First he had to develop the basic literary-political programme of the journal. He did so in three leading articles published in the first issue — 'What is *Lef* fighting for?', 'Whom does *Lef* bite?' and 'Whom is *Lef* alerting?'*

When you compare these three articles to earlier articles and declarations by Mayakovsky it is obvious that the political schooling he had undergone had taught him much, extended his field of vision and set many problems in their place.

However, neither Mayakovsky nor his friends on the journal were yet able to free themselves completely from the survivals of their Futurist past. In the pages of *Lef* evidence can be found of the fact that good intentions are not always realised in practice.

It ought to be noted that the journal *Lef* did not in either theory or practice represent a group firmly united in all its principle orientations. It was to a large extent a gathering of 'freemen' where all moved together but each spoke for himself. When someone asked Shklovsky 'How many of you Lefists are there?' he replied 'We're concrete numbers, you can't add us up'.

Mayakovsky was of course answerable for the content of the journal, insofar as he was the responsible editor and published his work along with the rest, but it would be extremely rash to attribute to Mayakovsky everything that was said in the pages of *Lef* by all its contributors.

Mayakovsky held to the view that a journal did not need a single united platform on everything down to the most trivial details. It was important to create a place where people who were close to each other in their understanding of the tasks of literature and art could meet, argue and publish their works.

As far as this aspect of his editorial work is concerned, Mayakovsky was extremely successful. The names of writers and artists who were later to become major figures made their first appearance in the journal *Lef*. Thus the seven issues included: Mayakovsky, *About This, Jubilee, To the Workers of Kursk, Vladimir Il'ch Lenin, Part I*; Aseyev, *The Black Prince*, Vladimir Khlebnikov *Ladimir, Razin's Boat*; B Pasternak, *The Kremlin in the gale of late 1918, High Fever*; V Kamensky, *Hymn to 40-year-old youth*; I Babel, *The Red Army Stories, The Odessa Tales*; S Eisenstein, *Montage of Attractions*; Dziga Vertov, *The Kinoks*. Articles by the literary critics Y Tynyanov, V Shklovsky, V Eikhensbaum, G Vinokur, B Tomashevsky, G Polivanov, A Tseitlin. The work of the architects the Vesnin brothers, and the artists A Rodchenko, V Stepanova, and A Lavinsky.

* See *Screen* v 12 no 4, pp 32-37 (now out of print).

But Mayakovsky did not limit himself to attracting authors to the journal. He sometimes set them particular creative tasks brought to the fore by the revolutionary reality. In 1923 he proposed that *Lef* poets write a poem on the occasion of May 1. All seven works were published in *Lef* no 2.

After Lenin's death, Mayakovsky suggested to the philologists that they take on the study of the language and style of Lenin. Six articles on the language and style of Lenin were published in no 5.

If the content of *Lef* had been limited to examples of the creative and scholarly practice of its collaborators, it could in many respects serve as a model of active editorial practice. At the same time it would not have provoked the violent opposition which *Lef* came up against from the first days of its existence. The reason for this was the articles and attacks – part-proletkult, part-Futurist, part-Formalist – which immediately hit the eye of Party literary critics.

Despite the conviction of Mayakovsky and others that 'we respect the classics', the bombardment of the 'old academy art' continued. Despite Mayakovsky's poem *Jubilee* in which he assesses Pushkin's great genius better than anyone, the Lefists took up the absurd position of people 'throwing Pushkin overboard from the steamer of modernity',* rather than helping the broad mass of people to read and understand him. But on this question the Lefists were not concerned with the masses, they went on settling accounts with their literary opponents whom they accused of epigonism. Naturally the Party's literary activists were not long in giving the Lefists a firm rebuff on this point.

The Lefists opposed the formula 'art as cognition of life' with their own formula 'art as life-building'. Obviously there can be no cognition divorced from practical activity, and there can be no practical activity not founded on cognition.

No one would oppose *Lef*'s call 'Artists, into production!' No one would dispute the significance of the artist's participation in factory production processes. But when that call was sharpened polemically for use against all those who worked in the fine arts, all those who painted easel paintings, and when the easel painting itself was declared 'a bourgeois belch', the *Lef* summons was transformed from a simple working proposition into an intellectually contrived Futurist attack.

In defending and propagandising their theoretical arguments, a section of the Lefists failed to come to terms with the tasks of building the nation's cultural life and stood in direct opposition to them. It was in this that the survival of past intellectual errors made themselves apparent.

The least mistaken in all this was Mayakovsky himself who

* From 'A Slap in the Face of Public Taste' (1912), Manifesto of Hylacian Poets, who included Burlyuk, Kruchenykh, Mayakovsky.

worked tirelessly during the remainder of *Lef's* existence for VTIK's* *Izvestiya* and in a whole series of other organs of the press, never for a moment breaking off his publicist work.

Mayakovsky showed his political maturity and correct understanding of the literary situation in the agreement which was drawn up between the *Lef* group and MAPP. Mayakovsky was glad to unite his literary struggle to the efforts of young workers to find themselves a place in the literary life of the country.

The agreement between *Lef* and MAPP, published in no 4 of the journal, was totally directed against the policy of *Krasnaya Nov'*. There even existed a 'secret addendum to the agreement' not included in the published version which stated that 'the parties to the agreement are bound not to take part in the writers' workshops Krug, Union of Writers, etc or their publications, and to withdraw their members from these groups, if any such exist.'

The agreement cut the aesthetic intellectuals off from *Lef*; they saw in this union a lowering of the 'high standard' of literary artistic principles. On the other hand the agreement drew to *Lef* those who were conscientiously trying to join the socialist contingent of Soviet literary forces.

The pull to the left was extremely strong. It sometimes took such absurd and freakish forms that Mayakovsky was obliged to use the most drastic measures to drive out people who came to him with proposals that *Lef* should head some fantastic front of left art.

People used to say: 'We are the periphery and we lack a centre. You must be our centre'. Mayakovsky tried to argue that the very idea of a periphery and centre were meaningless in questions of creative work, and that *Lef* was not the headquarters of any front, but a journal which printed the works of authors who shared a common literary platform; that those who wished could send in their works to the journal and if they were found suitable, they would be printed. To no avail: people demanded an organisation with a centre, a periphery, officers, regulations, and orders.

It culminated with the most persistent group of 'organisers' calling the 'first Moscow conference of the left front of art' in January 1925. Mayakovsky willy nilly took part.

The journal *Lef* was the subject of sharp criticism at the meeting. It was pointed out that *Lef* was not the journal of the left front of art, but that of a group of writers who had seized supplies of paper and were refusing to serve the 'left front' as a whole. It was agreed that this group of writers could in no way claim to lead the whole of the 'left front', especially since their literary

* *Vserossiiskiy (Vsesoyuzniy) Tsentral'nyy Ispolnitel'niy Komitet* or All-Russian (All-Union) General Executive Committee: the central executive committee of the Congress of Soviets—All-Russian for the RSFSR, All-Union for the USSR from 1923—with a membership of 2-300 elected by the Congress of Soviets.

74 practice was directly opposed to the leading principles of the 'left front', and 'lagged behind' them. In particular, Mayakovsky's poem *About This* was assessed as a work which directly contradicted the entire orientation of the left front of art. It was essential, it was said, to create a powerful left front of art, united in all its principles, headed by people worthy to be its leaders. There was even a proposal for a takeover of the journal by a future leadership of the front, but this drastic step was not taken. It was decided to leave the journal to Mayakovsky and his group but to declare it 'a special instance' of the left front with no authoritative significance.

At the meeting Mayakovsky voiced an uncompromising protest against all 'hard line' programmes and 'rigid' organisational frameworks. He understood perfectly well the childish nature of the organisations game. He understood that that game concealed motives which had nothing to do with creative work. Mayakovsky stood firm on his understanding of *Lef* as a free association of individual artists united, not by external forms, but through collaboration in work.

The meeting made such a bad impression on Mayakovsky that he felt constrained to express this in a special announcement.

Announcement

To the organisers of the so-called 'conference of the left front of art':

Having listened and given careful attention to the two tedious days of the 'conference', I am obliged to announce: I do not have, nor do I wish to have any connection with any of the resolutions or conclusions of that conference. If I could have imagined even for a moment that that clamorous conference – called under the serious slogan of 'unification' – was going to understand (in its most 'active' section) questions of organisation as the organisation of gossip, and to substitute Chuzhak's modernised version of nadsonism for the militant theory and practice of Lef, I would clearly not have wasted a minute at any of its meetings.*

VI Mayakovsky, 17/1/1925

The conference had no practical results and the 'left front' did not therefore organise itself. The journal *Lef* soon ceased to exist. The overt reason given was the journal's financial unviability. But there were however, other deeper reasons. The journal was becoming increasingly divided internally, certain of its parts contradicted the rest more and more. Energetic and vocal, but in many ways fallacious artistic programmes, clearly exaggerated polemics on

* The term comes from Nadson, Semyon Yakovlevich (1862-87), a minor poet and the author of sentimental verse who came to epitomise bad poetic taste.

purely artistic questions, etc thrust their way to the forefront, squeezing into the background the journal's most valuable element – the works of writers and first and foremost those of Mayakovsky. Thus an at first glance paradoxical situation arose whereby the more the mass of readers admired Mayakovsky's work, the less interest they had in the journal he edited. The final issue (no 7) came out in spring 1925 in 1,500 copies. It contained the first part of Mayakovsky's *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin*.

VI

In the years 1924-26 during which Mayakovsky wrote the poem *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin*, a cycle of verse from abroad, the poems *Conversation with a Tax Inspector*, *To Sergei Esenin*, and *To Comrade Nette* and many others, he rose to become the greatest poet of the Soviet Union, resembling in very little the rebel-Futurist who had attempted to open conversations with the broad mass of workers through his paper. Now Mayakovsky had access to the millions-strong audience of Soviet readers. He could speak to them from the pages of every paper and journal, which rejected nothing he brought for publication.

Mayakovsky was thereby able to extend the effective scope of his work. The evenings he organised in Moscow, Leningrad and the major towns of the Soviet Union gave him an opportunity to talk to his readers face to face. Mayakovsky covered enormous distances with his literary appearances.

Given this, Mayakovsky clearly had no need of a magazine or platform of 'his own'. Every platform in the country was open to him. Nevertheless, Mayakovsky still clung to the idea of publishing a revival of *Lef*.

The reason for this was the inadequacy of the organisational framework of the literary life of the period. The overall body of writers was divided among three major unions: VAPP (All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers), the Union of Peasant Writers, and the Union of Writers. These were mass organisations which included writers of varied tendencies, tastes and orientations. The mark which distinguished writers in these three organisations was their social origin: worker, peasant or bourgeois intellectual.

Alongside these large organisations there existed small groups which brought together writers linked by common creative principles: Kuznitsa (Blacksmithy), Pereval (Crossing), the Constructivists* and *Lef*.

In 1926, on the initiative of VAPP, the question of the creation of a single federation of Soviet writers was raised. After discussions and negotiations a constitution for the Federation of Soviet Writers' Unions was elaborated and approved. The three

* This refers to the Literary Centre of Constructivists 1923-30 (Selvinsky, Zelinsky, Lugovskoy, Bagritsky, Inber).

76 basic organisations figured as founders of the federation. Its council consisted of representatives from the three major unions (seven members from each). The Kuznitsa, Pereval, Constructivist and *Lef* groups did not feature among the founder members. They were advised to distribute their membership among the three major unions. The list of members of the council included no one from any of these groups. Mayakovsky himself was not listed.

Naturally, Mayakovsky couldn't accept the third-ranking position he would have had in the Federation of Soviet Writers. He said with feeling: 'Abram Efros is to sit on the council representing the "bourgeoisie" and I am to be under him. It's ridiculous'.

Mayakovsky went to G M Krzhizhanovsky who was in charge of organisational matters relating to the creation of the Federation and explained the absurdity of the situation that had arisen. Krzhizhanovsky agreed with him completely and the question of the entry of the four writers' groups was reconsidered. They were offered the opportunity of entering the Federation without dissolving, and of having their own representation in the council. For *Lef*, Mayakovsky was assigned four representatives who would represent him and some ten colleagues. VAPP, to which Mayakovsky was most strongly attracted, did not see their way to bringing him into their work and drawing him in definitively; it did not occur to them to include him in their list of representatives in the council in his capacity as major poet of the revolutionary proletariat. Instead they suggested he join the non-aligned, 'non-Party' Union of Writers.

In connection with these events and as a result of them, the idea of a journal of 'one's own' – a resurgence of group isolationism – gained force and roused Mayakovsky to present an application to the publishing department of the Communist Party's Central Committee towards the end of 1926.

'I am approaching you on behalf of the workers on the left front of art with a request for your support in the publication through Gosizdat of a monthly journal to be entitled *Lef*.

'The task of the journal will be to continue the work begun by the paper *The Art of the Commune* in 1918-1919 and the journal *Lef* in 1923-24. That task is: to use art in socialist construction and at the same time to raise the level of that art as much as possible; to bring art into industrial production as an essential factor in the industrialisation of the country; to fight against hackwork and the tendency towards aestheticism, against the "restoration" of old art and other petty bourgeois tendencies. Our slogans are well known enough from our previous work and have become particularly pertinent now, in relation to the tasks currently being raised by the party and the Soviet government.

'Vladimir Mayakovsky recommends his proposal to the attention of the editor in chief.'

The department raised no obstacles to the publication of the journal and it began appearing through Gosizdat in 1927 in thin note-book form, three printed pages a month under the title '*Novy Lef* (New Lef), *journal of the left front of art*'. Mayakovsky wrote an introductory article for the first issue in which he explained the aims and tasks of *Novy Lef*.

By comparison to the declaration of the previous *Lef*, nothing new was said. It was clear that the literary battle was to continue, but it was not clear why this required the launching of a new journal. The literary battle which Mayakovsky was leading through his lectures and verses at that time had immeasurably surpassed the bounds of narrow group positions. This was no longer the group battle of former Futurists, but the battle of the entire progressive element in the literary sector. No exclusive journal was needed to wage that battle.

Of course in the pages of 'one's own' journal, all questions, and the whole polemic could be presented in a markedly sharper way than in the pages of the general press. But it was precisely this accentuation, this heightened polemical tone which represented the negative sides of the group journal. Such sharpening of issues blew up trifles, generalised particularities and confused perspectives.

During the entire course of *Novy Lef's* publication, Mayakovsky and his fellow workers were faced with the question – what should we print? And they formulated the response as follows: We shall print what cannot be printed in any other journal. But such material proved to be very scarce – almost everything could be successfully published in any of the journals of the time.

At the same time *Novy Lef's* literary propaganda was distinguished by its aggressive and challenging tone. V Polonsky, whose uncompromising stand against *Lef* was wrong on many points, expressed this feature of *Lef's* declarations in paradoxical but correct terms: 'One would not want to agree with *Lef*, even if they were right.' And in fact the entire polemics of Polonsky and others against *Lef* concentrated not on the content of the material printed, not even on particular and clearly erroneous claims, but on the arrogant, exaggerated, 'militant' tone of people who set up an entirely artificial opposition between their work and the whole of the Soviet literary world.

Much clamour was raised over *Novy Lef's* slogan – 'Closer to the fact'. *Lef* was accused of 'factography', of the indiscriminate and mechanical recording of facts, of calling for the rejection of artistic work in the name of newspaper reportage, grounds for which were found in certain statements in *Novy Lef* articles.

Of course these criticisms were exaggerated. The literary practice of such *Lef* writers as Mayakovsky, Aseyev, Kirsanov and others clearly demonstrated that *Lef* had no intention of rejecting the artistic work. The whole meaning of the slogan 'Closer to

78 the fact ' lay in its suggestion to writers that they base their work not on pure imagination, but in the main on a study of concrete reality. At the same time writers were urged not to ignore newspaper prose and journalism. It would have occurred to no one to protest against such elementary literary truths if the Lefists had not presented them in the form of a polemical attack on all literary work, and if they had been able to bring their propaganda for newspaper-journalistic work into line with the general direction of Soviet culture.

People who stood a little apart from literary polemics often didn't even understand what in fact *Lef* was being attacked for. Thus Yaroslavsky, speaking at the All-Russian congress on questions concerning the worker and peasant press movement in 1931 said:

' It needs to be said that no real work is being done here with the broad mass of worker and peasant journalists. The Party's special resolution in this regard is being poorly implemented. A massive organisation like RAPP is doing virtually nothing for the literary education of the broad mass of worker and peasant journalists. More than that – in the guise of a struggle against the survivals of leftism, the ' literature of fact ' is being discredited, and the cultivation of really genuine, good newspaper workers who could produce what is needed by the masses, is being held back. What we need at this moment is precisely the literature of fact, the clear description of the facts of socialist competition and shock work, the enthusiasm which characterises socialist construction, and the sharp class struggle taking place in one of the final stages in the building of socialism.'

As time passed it grew increasingly apparent that it was meaningless to persist in the publication of *Novy Lef*. With his characteristic strength and scope, Mayakovsky was working in all areas of cultural development, daily producing verse for *Komsomol Pravda* and dozens of central and regional papers, and fighting against philistinism, bureaucracy and decadence. He worked not as a poet from the sidelines, but as a socially committed activist, a publicist and a fighter. The polemics in *Novy Lef* and around it were an inessential and trivial matter compared with the creative tasks which Mayakovsky set himself. Not just inessential, but even to some extent damaging and lowering to his practice as a writer.

Around the middle of 1928, a conflict emerged within *Lef* between Mayakovsky's group and those colleagues who wanted to prolong the existence of the journal at any price. Mayakovsky announced his departure from *Lef* and so as not to disrupt the publication of the journal before the end of the year, he gave over the editorship, with Gosizdat's permission, to S Tret'yakov. The last five numbers of *Novy Lef* came out without the participation of Mayakovsky and those who left with him.

In October 1928, Mayakovsky organised a public appearance on the theme 'To the left of *Lef*'. In his speech he explained his motives for leaving *Novy Lef* and why generally he was suggesting the complete and final dissolution of the *Lef* group. The essence of his argument lay in the fact that all literary artistic groupings had lost their significance – that in our Soviet reality it was senseless to invent all sorts of intra-literary fronts, and that it was necessary to work together in closest collaboration with the whole of socialist construction on genuine and not imaginary fronts.

Without hauling down the positive slogans of *Lef*, Mayakovsky at the same time came out uncompromisingly against *Lef*'s groundless rejection of all supposedly outworn forms of art. 'I grant an amnesty to Rembrandt,' Mayakovsky said. 'I say that songs and poems are necessary, not just newspapers. . . . I admit all forms of art on condition that they actively work for socialist construction.'

It looked as if Mayakovsky had now permanently abandoned the thought of forming his own group. And such a thought would undoubtedly never have occurred to him again if the literary world had drawn all the right conclusions from Mayakovsky's speech. In fact things turned out otherwise. The leading group of Soviet writers, VAPP, met the dissolution of *Lef* with malicious satisfaction rather than comradely welcome. No steps were taken to bring Mayakovsky once and for all into the broad fraternal milieu, to purge him of all the survivals of sectarianism and elitism. This did not happen and Mayakovsky tried for a last time to get together a small group of colleagues, renaming *Lef* as Ref.

In October 1929 the first and only Ref (Revolutionary Front of Art) meeting took place. Mayakovsky gave a talk in which he said roughly the following:

'A year ago we dissolved *Lef*. Today we are launching Ref. What has changed in the literary situation in that year, and on what basis are the Refists now taking their stand on the literary front?

'Our past disputes with enemies and friends over which was primary – the "how" or the "what" of the art work – are now overlaid by our fundamental literary slogan – "for what" is the work being done; in other words, we are asserting the primacy of the aim over both content and form. If we take art as a weapon in the class war, then in our literary work we must above all have a clear idea of our general aim and of the vital tasks of socialist construction which confront us in their concrete reality. It is this standpoint which will determine our initial approach to every literary task today.

'We declare: only those literary means which lead to this end are correct. Orientating our programme in this way does not cancel out our former demand for new forms for a new content. And

80 while one edge of our weapon is directed against the defenders of "form for form's sake", and the innumerable aestheticisers and canonisers of form, the other is drawn against those who are trying to squeeze the Five Year Plan into a sonnet, and to celebrate socialist competition in the iambic pentameters of the Crimean-tableland.

'The literary situation of our day,' Mayakovsky concluded, 'confirms our constant struggle against a-politicism. It resounds throughout with an insistent demand addressed to art – to stand together with socialist construction, to take up a front line position in the class war.' (See the report in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, October 10, 1929.)

Among Mayakovsky's papers is preserved an unfinished draft of a preface to the proposed journal *Ref*. In it Mayakovsky intended to clarify in more detail the difference between *Lef* and *Ref*.

In essence, Mayakovsky's Refist statements expressed a full awareness of the subordination of literary-artistic problems to the aims and tasks of socialist construction. Mayakovsky stated a position totally acceptable to every Soviet writer participating in the class wars of his country. The entire course of Mayakovsky's work as a writer had led towards this realisation and had transformed the rebel Futurist into the leading poet of the Soviet epoch.

Why then *Ref*? Where was the need for it? And in fact *Ref* was no longer needed by anyone – least of all Mayakovsky himself.

On December 4, 1929, *Pravda* carried an editorial article 'Towards a consolidation of the Communist forces of proletarian literature'. Provoked by a concrete issue – the sharp polemics between the leadership of RAPP and the editorship of *Press and Revolution* which had united around itself workers from IKP, the Komacademy and RANION – the article was of enormous significance on questions of principle for all genuinely revolutionary workers in Soviet literature. The article read:

'Theoretical disputes are of course inevitable, and questions of literary-political practice can and should be argued out; but polemical ardour should be tempered by a sense of proportion and group interests – in other words the narrowly conceived interests of this or that literary grouping should not be placed before the interests of the Party which imperatively demands the consolidation of Communist forces on the basis of Marxism-Leninism.'

The article ends on a call 'to unite all Communist forces and, working from and through the basic proletarian organisation (VOAPP), to close ranks and advance towards the resolution of the enormous tasks which confront the Party on the literary front'.

Mayakovsky lost no time in drawing his own conclusion. The *Ref* meeting called in mid-January 1930 passed an unequivocal resolu-

tion – 'Not to organise any exclusively Refist groups or circles, but to seek entry into RAPP and to fight for our literary principles inside that organisation'. 81

In February 1930, speaking at a MAPP conference, Mayakovsky said:

'Do not confuse Ref with *Lef*. *Lef* was an aesthetic group which turned revolutionary literature into a self-enclosed aesthetic institution. Ref marks the transition to a Communist direction in the work of our writers – in other words, it is the route which leads to RAPP. And if I have entered RAPP it is only because the whole of my preceding work led me to this point.'

On February 6, 1930 Mayakovsky made the following statement to the MAPP conference:

'In order to realise the slogan on the unification of all the forces of proletarian literature, I ask to be admitted into RAPP.

1. I do not have, nor have ever had, any differences with the basic literary-political line of the Party promulgated by VOAPP.

2. Methodological differences in the sphere of art can be resolved within the confines of the association with resulting benefit to the cause of proletarian literature.

I consider that every active Refist must come to this conclusion which is dictated by all our previous work.'

Mayakovsky was received into the membership of MAPP by the unanimous decision of the conference.

Translated by Diana Matias

‘To accept or not to accept? For me the question never arose. It was my Revolution!’

This is how Mayakovsky formulates his attitude to the October Revolution in his autobiography.

Mayakovsky was a convinced Bolshevik and it was natural therefore that at an artists’ meeting he should express himself clearly and succinctly on the subject of the recognition of Soviet Power: ‘We must welcome the new power and open up relations with it’.

In political terms, everything was clear, but Mayakovsky did not manage to open up concrete and effective relations with the organs of Soviet Power immediately.

First of all he had to reach an understanding with the People’s Commissar of Education, A V Lunarcharsky. He had to reassure himself on Lunarcharsky’s attitude to ‘left’ art, to the Futurists, and to his own poetry. Mayakovsky’s position was that now

The Futurists are in luck.

The old tail coat

is coming apart

at all its seams . . .

and that the first duty of the People’s Commissar was to give every cooperation and support to ‘the art of the young’.

Anatoly Vasilyevich proved to be a man of extremely liberal aesthetic views – he was for innovation, for creative invention, he knew something of Futurist literature, and he considered Mayakovsky an extremely talented poet. As far as the Futurist’s theory on the abolition of all past culture was concerned, he agreed that much was of course outdated and much needed to be ‘renovated’; but his main concern at this point was not whether or not some of the old junk was surviving. On the contrary, he saw it as his revolutionary duty to do everything possible to safeguard the extraordinarily rich cultural heritage which had come into the hands of the people.

Mayakovsky was disillusioned. Having failed to come to any understanding with the People’s Commissar, and seeing no other propaganda outlets for ‘left’ art, Mayakovsky went to Moscow where, with David Burlyuk and V Kamensky, he tried to start up ‘a conversation with the people’ over Lunarcharsky’s head, persuading workers and peasants to turn away from old art towards an art which was in tune with the Revolution, towards ‘left’ art.

The ‘conversation with the people’ was conducted from the stages of the Poet’s Café in Nastas’insky Lane and the Pittoresque

on Kuznetsky Bridge, and from the pages of the first issue of 'The Futurists' Paper'. 83

Prominently displayed in the paper was the following announcement: 'The Flying Federation of Futurists – speakers, poets, painters – announces: free presentations of speeches, poems, paintings, to any workers' audience eager for revolutionary art. Contact the Poet's Café from 10 pm every evening.'

However, up till now we know of only one appearance before a mass audience, which the Futurists organised in a circus. There may possibly have been others, but basically, the conversation did not emerge beyond the doors of the café.

What was the theme of that conversation? The programme-manifesto of the Flying Federation of Futurists states:

'The old order was supported by three whales: political slavery, social slavery and spiritual slavery. The February Revolution destroyed political slavery, the road to Tobolsk is strewn with the black feathers of the double-headed eagle,* October hurled the bomb of social revolution under capital. The fat backsides of fleeing factory bosses loom on the distant horizon.'

This was the situation on the political level. But in the art field, everything went on in the old way.

'The theatre goes on as before, presenting the "Emperors of Judea" and such like (Romanov works).† As before, the heavy muddy feet of monuments to generals, princes, tsars' mistresses and tsarinas' lovers block the exits of young streets. Trinket shops grandly called "exhibitions" trade in out and out daubs executed by fine ladies in their dachas, rococo style or à la one of the various Louis'.

'And finally, at our own bright festivities, we sing not our own anthems, but the grey-haired *Marseillaise* which we borrowed from the French.'

Mayakovsky also wrote of this in his 'Open Letter' to the workers:

'I am amazed to see "Aidas" and "Traviatas" with all their various Spaniards and counts, ringing out from the stages of the theatres we have taken over; to find those same opulent roses from manor house conservatories in the verses you accept; and to see how your eyes are dazzled by paintings which represent the

* A reference to the fact that after he was deposed by the February Revolution, the Tsar Nicholas II and his family were taken secretly to Tobolsk, a small town in Siberia.

† Mayakovsky is referring in particular to a work by the Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich Romanov – *Tsar Iudeiski*, 'a drama in five acts', published in Moscow in 1914. An English version translated by V E Marsden under the title *The King of the Jews*; a sacred drama, was published, also in 1914, by Cassell & Co, London.

The Flying Federation of Futurists invited the people to turn away from 'old, musty art' and 'to hungrily tear off pieces of the lusty, raw art offered by us' (the Futurists).

In their decree on the democratisation of art, Mayakovsky, Kamensky and Burlyuk announced that

'along with the destruction of the Tsarist order, an end will be put to art's domicile in the pantries and barns of human genius – in palaces, galleries, salons, libraries and theatres. . . . Let paintings (colours) pour like many-coloured rainbows over the streets and squares, from house to house, ennobling and delighting the eye (taste) of the passerby.'

It was also announced that the 'first posting of verses and paintings would take place in Moscow on the day of publication of our paper'. And in fact, three small Futurist paintings were hung on the corner of Kuznetsky Bridge and Neglinnaya Street at the height of the second floor on March 15, 1918, the day the paper appeared. This was intended to signify – 'art has come out onto the street'.

Into the street, Futurists,
Drummers and poets!

However, all efforts to come out of the café into the streets to the people proved in vain. Apart from resounding slogans and the pictures on the walls of a building, the democratisation of the arts announced by the Flying Federation of Futurists went no further.

Mayakovsky soon realised the childishness of the enterprise and saw that the battle for the new art had to be waged, not from the stage of the Poets' Café, nor from the pages of his paper, but within the Soviet system, together with all those who were building the artistic life of the regenerated country.

In his first letter to L Y Brik from Moscow in mid-December 1917, Mayakovsky wrote:

'The café is for the moment a very pleasant place. As gay as the "Stray Dog" used to be in the early days.'

'Packed with people. Sawdust on the floor. On the stage, us ("me" at the moment – Dodya and Vasya** have gone until Christmas). Pretty bad. That's all. Futurism is in great favour. Masses of performances. At Christmas time there's going to be a Futurist (Christmas) tree party. Then – "the election of the three triumvirs of poetry". I'm negotiating a reading of *Man* at the Polytechnic Museum! . . .

* A St Petersburg nightclub which was the centre of early Futurist activity, particularly around 1912-13. The Italian Futurist Marinetti delivered several lectures there.

** Burlyuk and Kamensky.

' A huge amount of entertaining things going on, but unfortunately of a mimed nature given the inarticulateness of the characters involved. Imagine for instance Vysotsky, Marants and Shatilov* (after all the banks are shut!) listening earnestly to Dodichka's† " He had a passionate love for flies with fat arses ". A million new people. It's crowded and unthinking.'

But at the beginning of January he was already writing to LY:

' Things are as they were with me. My life's like a gypsy song: by day I loll about, by night I indulge the ear. The café's palled on me. It's a small-time flea's nest. Ehrenburg and Vera Inber are still something like poets. I've made plenty of public appearances. The Futurist Party was held at the Polytechnic Museum. Quite a crowd there, like at a demonstration. Right at the beginning of the evening it turned out that of the four people announced on the poster, Burllyuk and Kamensky wouldn't be coming, and Goltsschmidt‡ was crying off. I had to keep things rolling by myself. It makes me shudder to remember it.'

His later letters no longer make references to the Poets' Café or other platforms. In just one letter there is an ironic comment on the subject of ' smart ' writing paper: ' Beautiful? Yes? Pardon me for writing on such refined paper. It's from the Pittoresque and they just can't do anything without refinement.'

In June Mayakovsky said goodbye to Moscow and returned to Petersburg. He spent the summer with the Briks in Levashovo in a private pension. This was a kind of breathing space after the bustle of Moscow. Mayakovsky relaxed and gathered strength. During this time he was writing *Mystery-Bouffe*. L Y Brik recalls some of the typical aspects of that Levashovo summer in her unpublished memoirs.

' We went to Levashovo to the dacha. We took three rooms with board. Volodya painted landscapes in oils and wrote *Mystery*. Volodya wrote verses constantly – during meals, walks, conversations with the girls, work sessions – all the time! He used to mutter, gesticulating a bit as he walked. No company disturbed him – it even helped.

Volodya spent the entire days on walks with me, showing me his landscapes, asking if he were making progress as a painter. In the evenings he played " kings "*** with Brik and myself, but by the end of the summer it emerged that *Mystery-Bouffe* was finished. . . .

* Well-known Moscow merchants and financiers of the period.

† Burllyuk.

‡ A colourful figure of the period, Goltsschmidt called himself 'a Futurist of life' – to demonstrate his strength he used to break boards on his head.

** A Russian card game.

We were fed the same salted fish with dried peas every day. Bread and sugar were brought to us from Petersburg by our maid Polya. Polya used to bake the bread in bricks under a metal tin that used to hold Borman's "George" biscuits – it was black, crisp and tasty.

We sat at one end of a long table in the guest room. At the other end sat a voluptuous blonde. Suddenly the blonde disappeared and a very ugly, thin, old woman took her place. Volodya picked up his spoon to eat his soup, raised his eyes and said in a scared whisper:

"Where before was such a feast, there now stands a grave".*

We used to go mushrooming. There were a lot of mushrooms around, but not very good ones – the russula were beautiful and many-coloured. We used to leave them at the kitchen to be cooked. We tried bilberry jam with saccharine. Since then even on our hungriest days we never touched saccharine.

In autumn we had to return to Petersburg and we had no money to pay the pension. I sold my portrait, painted by B Grigor'ev in 1916, to the artist I Brodsky. It was a huge portrait, larger than life-size; it showed me lying on the grass against some kind of background glow. When Volodya saw it he said: "Lila in overflow".

I came across my portrait being carried on a cab down the Nevsky Avenue and was overjoyed that I'd got rid of that monstrosity and we wouldn't be in debt.

After Levashovo, Mayakovsky rented a small flat in our house (7, Zhukovsky Street) like the one we had earlier. For lack of space, the bath was in the corridor. In the bedroom there was an ottoman and a large mirror in a pink velvet frame.

In one of his letters to his sister in Moscow written from Levashovo, Mayakovsky wrote: "I'm being so nourished on milk here (six glasses a day) that tell mother not to be surprised if I grow an udder."

In Levashovo, Mayakovsky and Brik received a letter from Shterenberg and Punin, the heads of the IZO (Arts) department of Narkompros, inviting them to join the collegium. All 'our', 'left' people – Altman, Shkol'nik, Tatlin and Malevich (the latter two in Moscow) – had come into the department; a kind of fortress of the new art, the art of the young, had been created, from which we could do battle with the 'old men' of art.

Exchange of fire with the 'old' fortress – the museum department – began at once. As well as questions of principle, the battles between the departments were fought for all kinds of material benefits: for accommodation, for special rations, and for grants.

* A line from the poem 'To the death of Prince Meshchersky' (Na smert' knyaza Meshcherskovo) by the great Russian classicist poet, Gavril Derzhavin (1743-1816).

The IZO section insisted that the Government's main concern should be concentrated on better material conditions for living artists, organising exhibitions of their work and extensive Government purchase of the best of these works.

The museum department on the other hand insisted that the best accommodation space should go to the museums, that museum workers should be provided with academic rations and that money should be spent as a first priority on providing the museums with objects of value, and on their preservation and restoration. . . .

Mayakovsky worked enthusiastically in the Narkompros IZO, fought the 'old' in support of the new art, spoke at meetings and wrote verse for the IZO department journal *Art of the Commune*.*

Back in Levashovo it had been decided to set up an 'Art of the Young' publishing organisation to publicise the new art.

The IMO (Art of the Young) society began early in 1918 when Mayakovsky was still in Moscow. Strictly speaking there had never been any properly constituted 'society' or 'fraternity'. They simply took over an empty flat, no 21 at 5, Fontanka, and hung the paintings of young artists on the walls: Shkol'nik, Spandikov, Le Dantieu, and others. It was thought that buyers would come to see the exhibition and perhaps even make a purchase. But no such buyers turned up. It was all their own people who came – penniless enthusiasts of 'ultra-left' art.

The IMO centre was used for the organisation of informal group meetings and literary-artistic discussions for their 'own people'.

One way or another the IMO imprint had now come into existence, and Mayakovsky used it as his publishing pseudonym – as he had previously used the Asis (Association of Socialist Art) imprint for the second edition of his poem *Cloud in Trousers*, for the publication of *Man* and for *The Futurist Paper*.

On July 27, 1918, the question of the publication of Futurist literature was on the agenda of the discussions of the Narkompros literary collegium. The IMO imprint had not yet been mentioned, but discussions centred around the publication of an 'anthology of Futurist literature' – this was the future *Unsifted Word*, the first book published under the IMO imprint.

Mayakovsky put the proposal that Narkompros issue a collection of Futurist literature. The literary collegium under the chairmanship of A V Lunarcharsky agreed to Mayakovsky's proposal and asked him to present an estimate to the literature department. On the presentation of an estimate, a subsidy would be granted for the publication of the anthology.

Mayakovsky began work on compiling the anthology. However, before it was completed, a decision was made to produce an agit

* For further details on the 'Art of the Commune' journal, see 'Mayakovsky and the Literary Movements of 1917-30' in this issue.

88 album, to be published under the IZO imprint, but produced by the work force of IMO. The album was prepared and appeared for the first anniversary of the October Revolution under the title *Heroes and martyrs of the Revolution*.

The album consisted of eighteen large sketches with verse subtitles. The sketches were commissioned from the artists Koslinsky, Makletsov and others.* The verse text was written by Mayakovsky.

The album is marked 'published by the Arts department of the People's Commissariat of Education', and on the inside page, 'IMO Publishing Centre, Petrograd, Fontanka 5, Flat 21'.

By October, Mayakovsky had completed *Mystery-Bouffe*. He presented it together with *The Unsifted Word* to the Narkompros literary collegium for publication under the IMO imprint. The collegium accepted them for publication and both books also came out around the anniversary of the October Revolution – they were the first books published by Mayakovsky as part of the struggle for new art.

The notion of publishing an anthology of Futurist literature had occurred to Mayakovsky while he was still in Moscow during the period of the Flying Federation of Futurists. *The Futurists' Paper* carried a notice to the effect that Mayakovsky was preparing a collection of Futurist writings for publication through Asis. In Mayakovsky's report to the Narkompros collegium, this collection is still referred to as either 'an anthology of Futurist literature', or 'the Futurists' anthology', and is apparently not linked thematically with the Revolution in any way.

The collection was intended to give a notion of Futurist literature as the newest and most innovatory tendency in literature, but in the course of collecting the material, Mayakovsky changed his principle of selection; the idea of the link between the Futurists and Futurism and the Revolution came to the fore. Mayakovsky refers to this in his preface to *The Unsifted Word*:

'Of course the present book does not exhaust Futurism. It has selected verses on a particular theme – the word revolution by the revolutionaries of the word. The future will produce an account of Futurism full-grown; for the moment it is not a corpse which will allow itself to be dissected, but a fighter, unfurling its flags.'

The link with the theme of the Revolution decided the choice of material. The resulting anthology was not intended to be a summing up, a historical retrospective, a dissection of the corpse, but a militant collection of the work of a revolutionary literary group genuinely necessary to the Revolution. And therefore – not just an anthology, but a revolutionary anthology – a disassociation from the militarist Marinetti, the sugary-voiced Severyanin and their like.

The manuscript of *The Unsifted Word* anthology was presented

* Ivan Puni (Jean Pougny).

to the Narkompros collegium at the beginning of October. Thus the two months (August and September) which passed between the application for approval and the presentation of the completed manuscript were sufficient for a radical change to occur in Mayakovsky's attitude to Futurists and Futurism. In July Futurism for Mayakovsky had still been an innovatory literary movement, significant in itself. The Futurists were the revolutionaries of form. This was enough to earn them the right to publication by the revolutionary Soviet government.

In two months Mayakovsky had come to a different point of view. Futurists were necessary to the Revolution not because they were the revolutionisers of form, but because a genuine revolution in form was inevitably linked with social revolution. For this reason not all Futurists were necessary to the Revolution, but only those who had found a spiritual outlet in the Revolution. And for this reason *The Unsifted Word* was not a literary anthology of the work of the Futurists, but a revolutionary anthology of those young poets who stood on the barricades of art under the slogan:

'Today the socialists' unprecedented story is making a great heresy come true.'*

In those months (August and September) Mayakovsky started working on the IZO collegium. Of course, practical participation in revolutionary construction had an immediate and decisive influence on Mayakovsky's literary position. The divisions between the platforms of the various literary groups gradually began to lose their sharpness. Much was seen in a different broader perspective. And first and foremost, it became clear that only literature which moved in step with the Revolution was needed by the Revolution, and had the right to exist. This was the beginning of Mayakovsky's difficult road to his position as poet of the revolutionary masses, poet of the proletarian revolution and socialist construction. Dividing Futurism along the line of those 'for and against the Revolution' was a first step on that path.

The Unsifted Word anthology included the verse of Aseyev, Burlyuk, Kamensky, Khlebnikov, and Mayakovsky's *Our March, Revolution, War and the Universe* (part five). The material was selected by Mayakovsky who also wrote the foreword to the collection. A second foreword was written by Lunarcharsky.** Both forewords were intended to explain to the reader why an anthology of Futurist literature was being published and to reply in advance to the misunderstandings which such a publication might provoke.

Mayakovsky entitled his foreword 'This book should be read by everyone'. And he poses questions as if from a puzzled reader:

* A line from Mayakovsky's *Revolution*.

** For a full text of Lunarcharsky's preface see 'Mayakovsky and the Literary Movements of 1917-30' in this issue.

'Why?' and then 'What do we want with this incoherent jumble, these lurid slogan writers?'. Mayakovsky replies: 'All your objections are reformist lies.' He explains that the Futurists should not be held responsible for every piece of nonsense laid at their door. 'We, the young poets of Russia, having found a spiritual outlet in the revolution and taken our stands on the barricades of art, have nothing in common with the militarist Marinetti, or with the sugary-voiced Russian Severyanin.'

Mayakovsky explains further why

'we revolutionary Futurists are necessary to the proletariat – because we give socialism a new word. The bourgeoisie made a poetic cult of trivial sentimental emotions, harmonious landscapes, and portraits of well-born representatives. Its corresponding language is also gentle, polite, and well-bred. . . . And these poetic waters all flowed into the frozen expanses of dull, stereotyped rhythms.

'We (the revolutionary Futurists) have frightened away the cloudless skies over fine private houses with the red glow of factory chimneys. We have invaded the amorous whispering on cosy porches with the thousand-legged march of centuries. These are our rhythms – the cacophony of wars and revolutions.

This is why the revolutionary Futurists are necessary to the proletariat, why it is essential to read this collection of verses on the theme of "the word revolution by the revolutionaries of the word".'

The article 'everyone should read this book' is significant for its precise formulation of Mayakovsky's literary position towards the end of the first year after the Revolution. For the political activist – the revolutionary struggle; for the Red Army fighter – himself and his weapons; for the poet – his word; all three engaged in one and the same action under the slogan 'Long live socialism!' Everyone on his own strip of the front. With this formula, Mayakovsky disassociated himself on the one hand from those 'left' poets who did not participate in the fight for socialism, and on the other from those who failed to understand the significance of the new poetic language in that struggle.

When these two books were handed in for publication, Mayakovsky and Brik also presented the People's Commissar of Education, Lunarcharsky, with a memorandum-report on the publication of the books of the new art.

The list of books in preparation was as follows:

1. *The Theory of Futurism*: a collection of articles concerned with establishing the validity of the revolution in art.
2. *The Practice of Futurism*: a collection of articles elucidating the strategy of Futurism as a particular revolutionary movement.
3. *Studies in the theory of poetic language*. This will consist of

a reprint of revised articles from the first and second editions (1916 and 1917), and new articles on: plot-construction, rhythm, the theory of wordplay, method, the analysis of semantic variations, and also articles clarifying the fundamental methodological errors of Symbolism. The collection will have an additional section of texts and a full bibliographical list of literature on style available in Russian and European languages. Those involved in the work: Brik, Polivanov, Yakubinsky, Shklovsky, and others.

4. 1909-1919: the literature of the decade. A history of artistic achievements 'after Symbolism'.
5. Khlebnikov. Longer poems.
6. Kamensky. Verse.
7. Pasternak. Verse.
8. Mayakovsky. In six issues – everything written by the poet, with a critical essay.
9. *The Will of Millions* – a book.
10. Almanac. 'Our time in verse and sketches'.

In accordance with the agreement, IMO had the right to publish no more than twelve works per year. *The Unsifted Word* and *Mystery-Bouffe* had already appeared, and the list therefore contained ten titles.

Lunarcharsky looked through the list and marked his approval: 'Checked, interesting. Lunarcharsky, 10 February.'

The list had been compiled on the basis of a broad programme. The object was to present the theory and history of Futurism, or more accurately, of all the ultra-left artistic movements in Russian art 'after Symbolism'. The object was to be achieved by the studies on the theory of Futurism and on the history of futurist struggles, and by the collection of literary-artistic works beginning with *Sadok Sudei* (*A Trap for Judges*), which had appeared early in 1910. For the sake of an even decade, the beginnings of Futurism were fixed as 1909, thereby making 1919 the tenth anniversary of its existence – hence the title, 1909-1919. From then on this anthology was referred to as *The Unsifted Word*, second expanded edition.

The publication never appeared, but Mayakovsky transposed the decade 1909-19 onto his own *Complete Works*. This gave rise to suggestions from certain literary critics that Mayakovsky was pushing the beginnings of his literary career back to coincide with the first works of the Futurists, in which he had played no part. The suggestion was based on a misunderstanding. Mayakovsky considered 1909 to mark the beginnings of his literary activity, not because the first Futurist anthology *Sadok Sudei* appeared that year, but because in 1909 he was in Butyrsky prison and while there he filled a whole notebook with verse which was confiscated on his release. He mentions that notebook in his autobiography:

92 ' I read everything, all the newest things. The Symbolists – Bely, Bal'mon. I recognised their formal innovation. But it was alien to me. The themes and the images were not part of my experience. I tried to write as well but about other things. It turned out that to write like that about something other was impossible. It came out stilted and lacrimous. Something like this:

The forests dressed themselves in purple and gold,
Sunlight played on the domes of the churches,
I waited – but days faded into months,
Hundreds of wearisome days.

I filled a whole notebook with this kind of thing. Thanks to the warders – it was confiscated on my release, otherwise I would even have published it! '

Mayakovsky also spoke of this when he appeared at the Krasnaya Presnya (a district of Moscow) Komsomol centre on March 25, 1930, at an evening set up to mark twenty years of his literary activity. Explaining why he had organised the exhibition under the title ' Twenty years' work ' Mayakovsky said:

' In my life there was a break of two or three years when I was not involved with verse, but mainly with painting and sketching. And it was only from roughly 1912-13 that I began publishing in a regular way and literature became my definitive profession.'

The break of two or three years to 1912 was in fact from 1909. The fact that the year of Mayakovsky's first verse attempts coincides with the emergence of the Sadok Sudei group is pure chance.

The second series of books was composed of collections of the work of individual poets – Khlebnikov, Kamensky, Pasternak and Mayakovsky himself. Burlyuk and Aseyev were not included in the list because during those years they were in the Far East.

The first three works were intended to present the theory and practice of the current period. Firstly, *Studies in the theory of poetic language*, a revised and expanded reprint of the two collections of articles published by the Opoyaz (Society for the study of poetic language). This title was eventually published as *Poetics* (1919) in a markedly less comprehensive form than had been envisaged initially.

Then came the Almanach which was something in the nature of an expanded version of the album *Heroes and Martyrs of the Revolution*.

And finally there was the mysterious *Will of Millions – a Book*. This was the original title of what was to be the poem 150,000,000 which Mayakovsky even at this stage was planning to publish without the name of the author.

On July 18, 1919 IMO's representatives, Mayakovsky and Brik,

placed a report before the Commissar of Education Lunarcharsky, 93
which read:

To: The Commissar of Education, Comrade Lunarcharsky

On July 27, 1918 at a meeting of the Petrograd Narkompros collegium the question of a subsidy for the IMO publishing organisation came under discussion. The conclusion of the discussion was the collegium's approval of the subsidy and of the plan for the publication of books as presented by IMO; as a result an agreement was signed between Narkompros and the IMO publishing body. The collegium added a note to the effect that future publication would depend on the results of IMO's activities.

In the terms of the agreement we were entitled to publish twelve books annually. At this point, at the end of the allotted one year period, it is possible to assess the results of our work and to make an application for the means to continue our work and complete what still remains outstanding due to reasons beyond our control (namely, the shortage of paper and other printing facilities). IMO originally acquired the following works with a view to publication:

	price roubles	print kopeks	number
1. The Unsifted Word – a revolutionary Futurist anthology	6	50	5,000
2. Mystery-Bouffe, 1st ed.	6	50	5,000
3. Mystery-Bouffe, 2nd ed.	6	50	16,000
4. War and the Universe, 2nd ed.	3	75	24,000
5. Poetics			10,000
6. Complete Works of Mayakovsky	20		10,000
7. My Sister, My Life, Pasternak			
8. Complete Works of Khlebnikov			
9. The Unsifted Word, 2nd ed.			
10. To the Russians, Germans, and French			
11. The Art of the Commune			
12. Ivan			

The first six books have been published and distributed by us, which has enabled us to pay the authors' fees.

The remaining six were accepted for publication by us. But since in accordance with the agreement, authors' fees are payable only after the publication of the work, and the work can only be published on receipt of paper from the printing department, the issue of which has for the moment been stopped for all purposes other than agit work, we would ask you to ratify our estimate of 165,324 roubles 30 kopeks; this would enable us to carry on the literary work already under way until such time as the publishing situation has been regularised. The sum in question would be used to cover authors' fees on publication of the work.

The need for the publication of these works is fully supported by the reception they have been given by the mass reader. They

94 *were met with suspicion at first, but in the course of distribution they have captured the attention of readers: Mystery-Bouffe and The Unsifted Word for example, sold only twenty-five copies at first, to such workers' centres as The Communist, and this was on a commission basis; but a month later a total of 3,000 were ordered from the publishers. As a result, The Unsifted Word, of which only 5,000 were printed for fear of lack of sales, now has orders amounting to 30,000 copies. But there were not even enough available to supply all the public libraries, which must be provided with copies in accordance with the decision of the committee of experts.*

It should be mentioned here that our books have not gone into the retail shops but were distributed mainly in the regions in the course of our lectures to workers' meetings on questions of new art.

IMO has no publishing capital since under the agreement our publishing organisation – as purely an association of writers – received only the amount intended to cover authors' fees.

V Mayakovsky, O Brik

Members of the IMO Collegium. 18/VII/1919

The Commissar of Education met IMO's request and granted them a certain amount to cover authors' fees. But Lunarcharsky was unable to help out on the question of the publication of books. Publication therefore ceased.

Early in October 1919, Mayakovsky published his first ROSTA Window of Satire. A new stage in his biography had begun – the realisation of the things he had written about in *The Complete Works of Vladimir Mayakovsky*.

'We Futurists have discovered many Americas of the word, now being industriously colonised by all – even writers who fastidiously shy away from us. Soon our achievement will be, not an alphabet under construction, but the alphabet under study. Leaving what has already been written to the schools, I am moving away from what has been done and, by simply stepping over myself, I will write a new book.'

The new book was written by Mayakovsky during two years' work with Agit ROSTA. He called it *Terrible Laughter*.

Translated by Diana Matias

Osip Brik

I

The question 'What precisely constitutes a script?' is currently a subject of debate. What is it? An autonomous literary work, or merely the translation into film language of a pre-existent literary work (novel, story, play), or is it purely and simply a memorandum to the director indicating the sequence of scenes and episodes?

The argument is far from academic. The response given to this question will determine the kinds of measures taken to provide the film studio with a sufficient number of suitable scripts. It will determine the kind of measures taken to train a sufficient number of qualified script writers. And it will also determine the way the director/script writer relationship shapes itself in their combined work on the making of a film.

Undoubtedly there is a tendency among film workers to exaggerate the specific qualities of the art of cinema. There is a tendency to declare the group of film workers a closed caste reigning over the secrets of cinematic expertise. There is a tendency to make it as difficult as possible for the uninitiated to break into this caste. Hence the mistrust of theatre directors who go into film work. And hence the attempts to present the film script as an autonomous literary work.

But there is also a reverse tendency widespread among people insufficiently familiar with the specific nature of the art of cinema. They tend to see the film strip as some kind of transmitting device, like the gramophone recording. They feel there is no need for a 'special repertoire for the gramophone'. For them the question is wholly and simply one of successfully transferring existing literary and musical works onto the record. Not only that, they greet with open disbelief people who talk of some specifically cinematic repertoire and insist that cinema cannot do without special film scripts whose writing has taken full account of the specific features of the art of cinema. They feel they are being deceived, taken for a ride, that advantage is being taken of their lack of familiarity with film work.

What are the practical consequences of the bias in each case? The bias towards *specificity* leads to the production of crude and superficial scripts crammed with cinematic trick effects, visual jokes and all those film clichés which the script writer remembers from his own past viewing. Scripts of this kind can contribute nothing to resolving the most complex ideological and thematic problems which confront Soviet cinematography. Films made from such scripts are out-of-date before they reach the screen. And the heads of the film studios are quite right when they put up a fight

But the opposite bias is no less dangerous – that is, the bias towards discounting *specificity*. The cinema is not a gramophone. It is not the mechanical transmitter of a pre-existent art work. The cinema is an independent art with its own means of expression and its own methods of representation. There is such a thing as illustrative drawing; nevertheless, no one would dream of denying the independent existence of fine art. Any visual object can be transferred with all its accompanying noises, but this does not in any way justify the claim that the role of cinematography ends there. There can be no doubt that the genuinely cinematic work cannot be produced without a script which makes full use of all the means special to the cinema. A film which is made as some kind of record of a theatrical performance or as the cinematic illustration of a work of literature will inevitably slip across the screen as a pale, dry shadow of the genuine art work which exists somewhere outside the screen. Such films impoverish cinematic art and cineastes are right in protesting against the subordinate and transmitting role to which that art is condemned by those who ignore its specificity.

Where does the error lie? In the fact that the script is not an independent literary work, nor some kind of literary manual for the adaptation of a novel or story for the screen, it is not a literary work at all. A script is the outline of a future film, set out in words. It would be odd for instance to ascribe an architectural plan sketched out in water colours to the products of fine art. Although there have been architects who drew their projects with particular care on the assumption that their pictures would make a good impression on a client poorly-versed in questions of construction. Just as there are script writers who lavish particular attention on the elaboration of the literary texture of their scripts and clearly stake something on 'the magic of the word'. But such architects and script writers are not among the best of their profession.

The script is written in words. But this in no way makes the script a literary work, let alone an autonomous one. The script is a system of cinematic images and devices calculated to make the author or authors' artistic project open out on the screen in the forms of cinematic art. The fact that we do not have any means other than words with which to plan the future film is in no sense intrinsic to the script; rather, it is a defect. In some cases an expressive photograph can give a fuller idea of the future than long pages of flowery literary script. Scripts are written for the people who will be making the film. An understanding of the film envisaged has to be conveyed to them by all the means available and for this purpose, literary language is far from the only or the most appropriate means.

Clearly, someone who is unfamiliar with the system of means of expression characteristic of the cinema, or whose knowledge is

confined to a poor assortment of cinematic trick effects and clichés, is not going to produce an adequate script. Who writes the script is not important – he may be a writer, a playwright, a professional script writer or a clerical worker in the film studio; what is important is that in working on the script he should understand what it is he is working on and what he is writing for. All those different claims which have alternately staked everything on the writer, the 'classics', the script writer, or any chance passer-by, are therefore quite irrelevant. The only real stake that can be made is on the profound study of the cinematic means of expression.

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II

Writing a script means constructing a project for a future film. But the means of expression of the cinema are numerous. Piling up these means in an unsystematic way is to be avoided; certain of them should play a leading role while the rest are used in a secondary way as and when they are required. Otherwise the film will not emerge as an organic work of art but as a series of unrelated cinematic trick effects and film sketches.

Soviet cinema still has many of these formless, naively assembled films. They are usually described as 'good in patches, but unsuccessful as a whole'.

When an architect draws a project for a building, he knows precisely what that building is going to be – a house, a factory, a theatre, or a triumphal arch. It would never enter his head to plan just a building in general. Whereas our script writers quite often write undefined scripts without pausing for a moment to consider the kind of film in view. Many of our directors are equally prone to this error.

The question of film categories is one of the most fundamental questions of film production. Like any other system of production, the cinema cannot work productively without first precisely defining its range and establishing its type of production.

The kinds of film possible are numerous. And the more precisely this is defined, the clearer the script writer and director are about the kind of film they are working on, the more easily they will find the necessary means of expression and the more organic and successful their film will be.

'Making a film with Moskvín, Il'insky, or Khokhlova' is a formula which has been much decried here. It was felt that this sort of orientation towards the actor lowered the ideological and thematic significance of the film. But this is not so. An orientation towards a particular actor does not pre-determine a film's ideological and thematic concerns, but delimits the specific set of means of expression which the film makers will bring into operation in the realisation of their film. Undervaluing the film actor as a key means of expression has led to the impoverishment of

98 the art of film acting; as a result Soviet cinema has produced no major film actors and has failed to enrich itself with a new supply of the means of expression provided by film acting.

And for example, the landscape film is a perfectly legitimate genre. There can be no objection to a film which bases itself on a maximum exploitation of the specific features of landscape filming appearing on the Soviet screen. There is nothing ideologically or thematically prejudicial to our cinema in that. Mikhail Kaufman's unjustly neglected work *Spring* (1929) might serve as an example here.

Sound film brings great diversity to the kinds of film possible. But while it enriches the cinema with new means of expression, the sound track at the same time increases still further the danger of an unsystematic and eclectic use of those means of expression. Following the maxim that 'variety is the spice of life' our film workers often cram everything possible into the film, oblivious of the total lack of form in the resulting product. It might be thought that defining the kind of film worked on too rigidly will lead to the stereotype and the standardised product. But this is a groundless fear.

The possible combinations of means of expression are so wide-ranging that the stereotype and stagnation need not be feared. The classification of films according to type is not aimed at standardising them in the commodity sense; rather it should serve as an artistic restraint imposed by the film makers themselves.

An economy of means is an essential condition for the fully-realised art work. A script is the outline of a future film. The basis of that outline is the author's cinematic intention which can be of the most varied kind:

- it is possible to conceive of a film which would give the film actor an opportunity to reveal the full range of his acting skills;
- it is possible to conceive of a film which will present a particular area of our socialist construction in the most forceful way;
- it is possible to show on the screen hitherto unknown countries, peoples and ways of life;
- the emotional riches of music could be utilised to produce a film-symphony, a film opera, or a film-operetta;
- one could make a film which used the means of expression offered by children, animals, birds, insects and household articles.

Film projects can be extremely diverse. All of them are valid as particular film types. The only important thing is to establish precisely the kind of film - that is, the film type - being envisaged and to subordinate one's creative imagination to that task.

III

The theory of Soviet script writing has still to be written. The

problems confronting the Soviet script writer are too wide and too unlike what the script writers of bourgeois cinema have to deal with. But Soviet film workers have a rich practical experience acquired over sixteen years' work in the cinema and it would be inexcusable if that experience were not taken account of and recorded. As we have said, a script is the outline of a future film. We see the finished films and we cease to be interested in their outlines. The realised object thrusts the process of its construction out of our consciousness. The script drops into the wastepaper basket and ceases to exist even as an archive document; the rare enthusiasts of the art of script writing are obliged to study from the finished film.

But, as we said, the script is not a work of literature. Even if the type-written sheets which we call the script were to be preserved, they would hardly suffice as a basis for recording the total process of the script writer's creative work.

The relevant aspects are not just what the script writer commits to paper, or what the film preserves of his original intentions, but the sum total of ideas and innovations which he expended in the course of his work on the projected film.

What the development and growth of Soviet cinematic skills requires is not the script writer's notes, but the total experience of his work on the ideological, thematic and aesthetic problems confronting the Soviet cinema.

In such a perspective, the process of work on the script is far more important than the finished script. It is essential that we ask our film writers to recollect and record their working experience before it is too late. It is essential that we persuade script writers to present a detailed reasoning of their work as a whole, together with the finished script. It is essential that we preserve all the agendas and minutes of script conferences.

Only a systematic preliminary collation of concrete experience will provide us with comprehensive material on which to construct a theory of Soviet film writing. As a start, I will give a brief account of how I wrote my script for *The Heir to Genghis-khan*.*

IV

I ran into Comrade Novokshonov at the Writers' Club. I knew that he had been to the Far East during the Civil War and that he could no doubt recall a store of interesting facts and incidents.

I put the question to him. He thought for a moment and then said:

' There was an incident of the kind. The English occupational forces captured a Mongolian lad who had fought with our partisans. When they searched him they found an amulet on him containing

* Directed by V Pudovkin, 1948.

100 an inscription in Mongolian to the effect that its possessor was the heir to Genghis-khan. The English wanted to blow the thing up into a whole affair and proclaim the lad Emperor of Mongolia. But it seems nothing came of it.'

I shook his hand and said: 'Thanks, that's a splendid theme for a script.' Novokshonov gave me a guarded look and said: 'Yes of course. I'm writing a story about it. If you do turn it into a script, you should say that its "from a story by Novokshonov"'.* I agreed of course, but Novokshonov never did write the story.

When I began work on transforming the episode recounted to me into a script I first established what the basic idea of the projected film should be. I formulated it as follows: the occupational forces cook up a political bluff, speculating on the nationalist feelings of the local population, so as to strengthen their hold over the occupied country. But the affair comes unstuck because the local population and the subject of the bluff himself, loathe the invaders and ally themselves with the Red partisans who bring them real, not sham, liberation.

The entire narrative line of the script emerged in response to this formulation. First, I needed to show the relationship of the Mongolian population and particularly the central figure – the young Mongolian – to the invaders. I had to present a typical confrontation. To achieve this I chose a ruse widespread in trading practice – the crude cheating of the natives by enlightened European merchants, buying up valuable raw materials for next to nothing.

The first episode of the script thus crystallised itself: it showed how the young Mongolian goes into town to sell a silver fox fur, reckoning to get a good price for it: how an English merchant wants to cheat him; and how he loses control and lunges at the Englishman with his knife.

The clash was thus achieved. I then had to develop the reaction of the invaders. 'A white man's blood has been spilt.' The insult had to be brutally avenged. The invaders demanded that the criminal be surrendered to them but he was concealed and helped to escape.

In its further development the narrative had to link the Mongolian with the Red partisans. I had to find an extremely simple and expressive episode which would allow the sympathies of the young Mongolian to be revealed. To this end I made the young Mongolian the chance witness of a skirmish between a brigade of partisans and a brigade of invaders.

* Novokshonov did in fact write the story, under the title 'The Heir to Genghis-khan', but shortly after its completion in 1937 he was arrested, and the work could not be published until much later. It first appeared in 1965 in the second issue of the literary almanac *Angora*.

Quite near him on the edge of a ravine a partisan and an English officer are engaged in hand to hand combat. The partisan is on the point of being killed. At that point, the Mongolian, for whom the sight of the English officer is already closely associated with theft, deceit and violence, flings himself into the fray and helps the partisan to throw the officer into the ravine.

This incident established the tie between the Mongolian and the Red partisans. But it had to be further strengthened. I therefore introduced an episode in which the Mongolian is present at a dying partisan leaders' farewell to his men. The profound grief of the partisans and the calm words of the dying man in which the word 'Moscow' is frequently heard, makes a strong impression on the Mongolian and lends emotional force to his ties with the partisan force.

This episode closes the first half of the script. Its purpose was to present the structure of the social forces involved (invaders, Mongolians, Red partisans) and a 'personal background' of the main character. The development of the central episode in the script begins with the capture of the young Mongolian by the invaders.

At this point strong dramatic tension was essential in order to underline as sharply as possible the idea of the bluff which flashed into the minds of the imperialist intriguers. The action had to be developed in such a way that the discovery of the amulet with the inscription disrupted the natural flow of events and the carrying out of the bluff would meet with serious external obstacles.

With this in mind, I unfolded the narrative in the following way: The Mongolian is taken prisoner, interrogated, and in the course of questioning it emerges that he is a Red; he is therefore condemned to be shot. An English soldier leads him out to be executed. But the soldier is unwilling to shoot down the Mongolian. He tells him to run but the Mongolian doesn't understand him. He just stands there smiling. The soldier is held back by a sense of military duty and cannot bring himself to free the Mongolian. He shouts at him, shoves him, and when the latter at last realises what it's all about and runs, the soldier screws up his eyes and fires after him.

This whole scene is essential firstly in order to differentiate between the occupying force and show that the active bearers of imperialism are the officers, not the rank and file soldiers; and secondly, to heighten the dramatic turn of fate which takes the Mongolian from the firing squad to the throne.

Parallel to this execution scene runs the deciphering of the inscription found among the Mongolian's belongings. The idea of the political bluff grows clearer as the deciphering progresses and by the end of the reading, which coincides with the shot fired by the soldier, it has become a firm decision. The end of the episode flows naturally from this: 'Bring back the Mongolian'. The task

102 is willingly fulfilled by the same soldier who fired after the Mongolian. He finds the Mongolian wounded and bleeding, is relieved that he is still alive and can be revived and rescued.

After this the task of the narrative was to present the realisation of the bluff. The Mongolian is brought to an operating table, his wounds are cleaned and patched, he is treated and put back on his feet. He is looked after, fed well, dressed ceremoniously and an effort is made to win him over. But the Mongolian is on his guard. He doesn't understand what is going on and doesn't trust them. The situation thus produced needs to be emphasised. Its particular significance has to be revealed through some small, characteristic episode. To this end I brought into the script a confrontation between the Mongolian and that same merchant who robbed him of the silver fox fur and whom he had stabbed with his knife.

The merchant comes to command headquarters. He brings his fiancée a splendid silver fox fur. She puts it on and accompanies the merchant to a soirée held in honour of the future Mongolian emperor. The Mongolian sees the fur on the lovely lady's neck. He stretches out his hand and seizes the fur as his own property. A scandal breaks out. The merchant demands to be avenged for the insult, but this time the politics are different. The merchant is led aside, reasoned with and given to understand that there are important political considerations at stake.

The bluff continues. Preparations are made for the Mongolian to be triumphantly proclaimed emperor. Obviously something has to occur at this point to reveal the invaders in their true colours and explode the cunningly invented plot like a soap bubble.

This 'something' I made an episode which is extremely common practice in military occupation, and which repeated an earlier episode featuring the main character: another shooting of a Mongolian prisoner. The denouement scene was constructed as follows in the script: the Mongolian is ceremoniously prepared for the grand appearance. At the same time a struggling Mongolian is dragged out of a cellar to be led before the firing squad. He breaks free and runs up the staircase. He bursts into the room where the ritual of proclaiming the Mongolian emperor is being conducted. Brutal gunmen follow on his heels and shoot down the condemned Mongolian in front of the whole assembly.

An eruption follows. The future Mongolian emperor tears off his luxurious robes, flings himself on the officers and attacks everyone and everything with wild and ferocious rage.

The soap bubble is burst. The bluff has failed. The story is ended. The final scenes of the script were originally different to the ones we see in Pudovkin's film. I wanted to show Moscow at the end. I therefore suggested that the film should close with the Mongolian escaping from the invaders, leaping onto a horse and galloping westwards. As he gallops the landscape changes – the

Urals, the Volga, and finally through the mist, in the distance, the outline of a great city. And as the outlines become increasingly sharp, when the whole audience has realised that that city is Moscow, so the film is over. Pudovkin preferred a different ending. He wanted to carry to its utmost limits the destruction wrought among the invaders by the Mongolian. Pudovkin turned the finale into a symbolic storm which sweeps away all taint of occupation, including people and tin cans. 103

I find Pudovkin's ending a bit cheap, and a little too 'cinematic'; it provokes the impression of a staged effect. I feel that Red Moscow would have been a far more credible final symbol than an artificial storm.

Translated by Diana Matias

Osip Brik

Khlebnikov and I were travelling on the tram together. We were sitting opposite one another. Khlebnikov was wearing a heavy fur coat with a fur shawl collar. On his head was a fur hat. He was leaning slightly back in his seat, his eyes half-closed, puffing out his lips. 'Vitya! You look just like an Old Believer', I said. Without a second's hesitation Khlebnikov retorted 'Of what persuasion?' That confused me. 'I don't know of what persuasion. Just an Old Believer generally.' 'I'm asking because the Old Believers were bearded – I'm clean-shaven.'

A conversation started up at someone's place, Kul'bin's I think, about the way the refugees were spoiling the Russian language. It was in Petersburg during the war. Shklovsky was pontificating about the Kievans who were bringing their provincialism into Russian speech. When Khlebnikov lost his temper his words came out in a high-pitched tenor. His bird-like shrill was heard now: 'Province derives from the Latin *'pro'* and *'vincere'*, which means to conquer. A province is a conquered country. As far as the Russian language is concerned Petersburg is the province, not Kiev.'

For Khlebnikov, the words 'Old Believer' and 'province' and all the other words of human speech were not conventional signs which designated something 'approximately' – for him every word was like a luxuriant, branchy tree blossoming with its own range of meanings and sounds, its own formal differences and resemblances, its own synonyms and homonyms.

For the vast majority of people words are an arbitrary combination of sounds by which we have 'agreed' to convey some particular meaning. Outside that agreement, the given sound combinations in no way distinguish themselves from 'meaningless' sound combinations.

It's like playing cards with chips. 'By agreement' certain objects are allowed to stand for chips – matches, nuts, buttons. Two categories of matches, nuts and buttons then emerge. Matches which are struck, and matches 'which go into circulation', nuts you can eat, and nuts 'which are money', buttons you sew on, and buttons 'which can be exchanged for matches and nuts'.

What exactly happened when I told Khlebnikov he looked like an Old Believer? Khlebnikov 'vaguely' reminded me of 'some' image of 'some sort of' old time Russians I had seen somewhere. And I designated that complex of the seen and the recalled 'approximately' by the words 'Old Believer'.

For Khlebnikov, however, they had not an 'approximate', but a rich and varied meaning which certainly included among other things the notion 'beard'. My words 'Old Believer' had therefore in no way covered the phenomenon they had been used to designate – namely the beardless Khlebnikov. 105

In addition, and this is most important, in order to sense the 'non-coverage' of the reality by the word, one had to have just as complete a sense of the reality as of the word. One had to remember the beard, not just within the complex constituted by the concept 'Old Believer', but also within the complex of the 'beardless' man I had tried to designate by that term.

Khlebnikov knew not just the meaning of the word 'province' but also the meaning of Petersburg and Kiev. Khlebnikov was a man of enormous learning with a most acute sense of reality. What nonsense it was to describe this man as 'not of this world'. He knew and perceived this world in all the subtleties and twists of its historical destiny and human psyche. Reading him carefully, you discover in his verse, his prose and his letters a million extraordinarily subtle, sharp, accurate observations, and details which are very much 'of this world'.

When Khlebnikov 'invented' words he did so in order to designate a newborn phenomenon, or a newly discovered variety of that phenomenon. Khlebnikov was never an aesthete of the word. He never thought a word outside the object or fact which it was intended to designate. When Khlebnikov wrote his poem *Incantation by Laughter** he was convinced that every one of his words would find its place in the many-sided real complex 'laughter'.

Kruchenykh said: 'The word lily has been soiled by use. I say E-u-y and the lily's snow-whiteness is restored.' This is aestheticism. There is no new phenomenon or new nuance in that phenomenon to correspond to the new word. The flower lily simply changes its name. It answered to lily and it will answer to Euy. That's all. For Khlebnikov this was not enough. Khlebnikov produced new realities along with new words. That was the whole point.

Above all, Khlebnikov never 'made up' or invented anything.

* Khlebnikov's poem consists almost entirely of newly-coined derivatives from the root *smekh* (laughter), and works on the possibilities of morphological derivations inherent in the Russian language. It is therefore impossible to render into English, but Vladimir Markov's translation, a few lines of which are reproduced below, as the translator says, goes some way to demonstrating the principle –

. . . Laughiness of the laughish laughers, counterlaugh the laughdom's laughs!

Laughio! Laughio!

Dislaugh, relaugh, laughlets, laughlets,

Laughulets, laughulets, . . .

106 He discovered. The inventor produces what does not yet exist. The discoverer conveys to people what has always existed. For this reason an inventor's creations may not take life, they can be still-born. Whereas the discovery has always existed and the question of its existence does not even arise. Electricity was discovered, the electric light bulb was invented. Geniuses discover, the talented invent.

Khlebnikov did not make up words. Khlebnikov revealed aspects within language which we did not even suspect.

Kirsanov takes two words and out of them makes a third. And this 'third' word has no corresponding reality. His word 'lyublyutik' for example – is this a kind of buttercup (lyutik)? or a nuance in love (lyubov')? Neither one nor the other, but an *objet d'art*.¹

But, it will be asked, what about 'the word as such'? 'As such' is precisely the point. The word must of necessity refer to the real, otherwise it is not 'a word as such'.

Translating one language into another is not a question of translating the words of one language into the words of another. It means re-telling in the words of one's own language the realities related by the words of the foreign language. To translate well one has not only to know languages, but above all to know the reality in question. However well a person knows the language, he will not be able to produce a good translation of say, a novel out of Negro life, if he has no notion of Negroes and their life. The vast majority of the blunders and oddities that bespatter translations occur not through lack of knowledge of the language, but through lack of knowledge of the subject concerned.

And I might add that the 'Greek word which has no meaning' is the match which has not become a chip. But of course it is not a 'word' – a word cannot mean nothing. *Zaum* (trans-sense) is not 'trans-sense language' (*zaumnaya rech'*). It is precisely 'trans-sense' – an extra-linguistic combination of the articulated sounds produced by the organs of human speech.

But from the moment any trans-sense sound combination finds itself a corresponding reality, it becomes a word. This was the case with the invented word *Khlysch* (playboy).

And the reverse: if an artificial word for a new reality is put together out of meaningful segments – which is how all our composite Soviet words were invented – only those survive which overcome their fragmentary nature and achieve an integral phonic form of their own. For example Narkom (people's commissar, from *narodniy kommissar*), komsomolets (young Communist, from *Kommunistichesky soyuz molodezhi* – Communist Union of youth), politruk (political instructor, from *politichesky rukovoditel'*). These were hastily composed from verbal scraps, and they have become words in their own right.

In his poem *About This* Mayakovsky has a marvellous example of

word-formation (line 616). The dominant theme reverberating through it is love. In line 577, the theme of travel to the north is brought in: 107

shores surge by –
vista after vista

and in line 609:

What land is this?
What strand?

Green-
Lap-
Love-land?

In an instant the two themes – love and travel – intersect. And suddenly the word 'loveland' flashes like a spark. Yes, a word! Because it designated the most real of realities – the poem's unknown quantity, its ultimate meaning.

But it would be extreme vulgarisation to prise loveland from the context of the poem and include it in the dictionary of the Russian language: 'loveland = the land of love'. Why a vulgarisation? Because the reality designated by the word loveland is unrepeatable, unique, and exists only in Mayakovsky in a particular moment of creativity. It is not generalisable. The word which flashed momentarily and illuminated that reality cannot be made common currency. Love-land is not the land of love.

There are many such unique poetic sparks and explosions in Mayakovsky. Mayakovsky is a lyricist. And his lyricism is autobiographical. The history of his times is also a part of his autobiography.

In our fighters
or in our land
they were

Or else
in this heart
of mine.*

A variation of the famous formula of the great lyricist Heinrich Heine: – the world split open, and the rift passed through my heart. . . .

Khlebnikov was quite different. Khlebnikov was not in any sense a lyricist. This does not mean that Khlebnikov was not capable of intense personal emotion, or that he was dry, callous and unfeeling. He was explosive, humorous and often profoundly sad.

* From *Very Good, An October poem*. Translations from *Mayakovsky*, translated and edited by Herbert Marshall, Dennis Dobson (London) 1965.

But it never occurred to Khlebnikov to write verse about his own emotions. He was reserved and shy. And moreover he had a different attitude to the word. For Khlebnikov the word was least of all a 'means of expression', the servant of thought and feeling.

The word for Khlebnikov lived its own rich life of sounds and meanings. Khlebnikov scattered words on paper like stars over the sky, and by them he read the fate of man and humanity.

What constitutes the sense of words? Not what they mean, but what they *can* mean. What do we mean when we say 'in the full sense of the word'? What is this 'full sense of the word'? It is the limitless diversity of existing and possible meanings of a word. The word in customary, everyday usage is not the word 'in its full sense', it is a word for which only a minor part of the meaning has passed through – that part which is needed in practice for 'exchange' and 'expression'.

Khlebnikov wrote with words in their full sense. And full to the brim, his words followed on one another without merging together, without conforming to one another, but existing, like the world of stars, according to the laws of attraction and repulsion. In Khlebnikov there are not combinations but constellations of words. Khlebnikov is a poet-astrologer.

'Stars, reading the stars, astrologer' – this is all very figurative and unclear. Agreed. But that's Khlebnikov. Stars, their life, their organisation, the laws of their movement are indisputably the prototype of Khlebnikov's creative system. He talked a lot about the stars.

'The bright southern stars awoke the Chaldean in me'

(Teacher and pupil)

'... Jot down the days and hours of your emotions ... and namely their angles, turns, climax points. I will build an equation.'

(letter to Kamensky)

'I have the equation of the stars, the equation of the voice, the equation of thought, the equation of birth and death.'

(letter to V V Khlebnikov)

This would in fact be an appropriate place to speak of Khlebnikov's mathematical calculations. But I want to say a little more about Khlebnikov the poet.

For Khlebnikov 'the word in its full sense' is not just the whole meaning of the word, but its whole range of resonances, because every sound is full of meaning for Khlebnikov. Every sound in human speech is meaningful. And Khlebnikov produced signifying constellations of words beginning with the letters N, V, S, K – thereby earning a smile from 'sensible' people.

What caused those sensible people to smile? How could they fail to smile when Khlebnikov was trying to play the most naive kind of trick on them? Khlebnikov wrote: 'K either begins words

about death – *kolot'* (stab), *koika* ([hospital] bed), *koniets* (end), 109
kukla (puppet/doll); or words for the deprivation of freedom –
kovat' (to shackle), *kuznya* (forge), *koltso* (ring), *klyuch* (key), *krug*
(circle); or for virtually immobile objects – *klad'* (load), *koloda*
(block), *kamen'* (stone). *kot* (cat). That's a laugh! What about
kisel' (Russian cranberry dessert), *kuritsa* (hen), *kolbasa* (sausage)?
How could you classify them? as linked to death? deprivation of
freedom? or virtual immobility? Come on! Stop pulling my leg!

But the laughter of these sensible people is misplaced. What
does Khlebnikov care about words which don't fall within his con-
stellation? What does a poet care about words which don't rhyme?
The ones he's concerned with do! What is it to Khlebnikov if his
constellation does not take in all the words beginning with K. And
why does it matter, what would be the point of laboriously
classifying all words beginning with K according to meaning?
That's not what Khlebnikov was doing.

Fools! Khlebnikov is not a cataloguer of words. Khlebnikov is
a poet. Khlebnikov was concerned with rhyming words, rhyming
them according to sound and sense. He wrote poems around the
letters K, M, S and V – the purest of poetry, poetry of consummate
skill, in which words are combined not according to the logic of
practical speech, but freely, self-sufficiently, according to the laws
of the 'word as such'.

The most remarkable book there is is the dictionary, the book
of language. It contains not only everything that has already been
said, or that will be said, but everything that can be said. This
has never been said by sensible people, nor will it be said by
them. What use is it to them! Poor sensible people, they won't
ever read Khlebnikov.

Translated by Diana Matias

Editorial note

1. Brik's description of Kirsanoff's method is reminiscent of Eisenstein's early remarks about montage: two shots colliding to produce a new concept. In fact, throughout this essay, Brik compares the poetry of Khlebnikov, Kirsanoff, Kruchenykh and Mayakovsky in terms similar to the arguments about montage in the debates between Eisenstein, Vertov and Pudovkin. Brik's analysis of ZAUM-poetry lends support to Kuleshov's statement that already before the revolution, the ideas of 'montage' were, as he puts it, 'floating in the air', ready to be picked up by artists and theorists.

Osip Brik

Brief outline for a script

A gang of thieves ran their operations in a certain large city. In the dead of night along deserted streets they used to divest belated passersby of their clothing. They palmed off their plunder on a dealer in stolen goods who had the clothes altered and sold in the town markets. On the grounds that alteration was an expensive business, he gave the thieves a very low price. . . . In the end the thieves grew tired of this kind of exploitation and decided to eliminate the middleman and somehow or other take charge of altering and selling the clothes themselves.

They gradually set up the business of altering the clothes in one of the town's basements. One morning a knock was heard and an old fellow came in carrying a bundle. He'd heard that this was a tailor's workshop and asked them to make him a coat. His request caused a bit of embarrassment, but it was awkward to refuse. The thieves got together and tipping each other a wink, took the old man's measurements and fixed a day for the fitting.

After the old fellow had left, the thieves considered the matter from all angles and decided that in the interests of the conspiracy it was inadvisable to make a mess of it — they'd have to sew the coat properly. They set to work without delay and with the single-mindedness characteristic of thieves.

Evening drew in and the time came to go about their nightly trade, but no one wanted to go out, or in fact had the time. 'You go, I have to tuck in the sleeves'; 'Well I have to cut the lining again . . .' — they kept passing things off onto each other. However, they did manage to push out two of their number.

That night they robbed someone on the bridge. Pulling off the man's fur and jacket the two thieves rushed to the street lamp and examined the sleeves in its light. There and then they settled an argument which had begun back in the workshop on the proper way to sew in a sleeve.

A few days later the old fellow received his finished coat. He was very pleased with the cut and the workmanship, and the price seemed acceptable. He even promised to send them clients.

After the old fellow had gone, the thieves gathered around the money they'd received for their work. What should they do with it? Keep it for luck? Spend it on drink? They had no idea. All that was clear was that this was an unusual kind of money.

The old man kept his word and clients started turning up. The work kept growing. By the time evening came the thieves were worn out. They didn't feel like roaming around out of the way

places. They just wanted to sleep.

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Then something unpleasant happened – the thief who was most expert at making buttonholes was picked up. The incident demoralised the whole workshop.

The thieves learnt to sew quite well. They bought a tailor's dummy. Fashion magazines started appearing in the workshop. The business began to bring in a reasonable income. Thieving was a risky business and if you took the risk into account, it wasn't even profitable.

They went out on their nightly raids more and more rarely, and eventually gave it up altogether. They were up to the ears in work at the shop. Gradually they started making things for themselves. When one of their number decided to get married they pooled their efforts and 'put together' a smart fur coat for him.

The young newlyweds went to the cinema, to the last performance. On their way home in a dark alley the groom was robbed of his fur.

The indignation of the workshop knew no bounds. 'What's the world coming to! It's impossible for decent people to go out into the streets!'

Translated by Diana Matias

ALTMAN, NATAN ISAEVICH (1889-c 1950)

Artist, founder member of IZO (qv), head of Narkompros (qv)
Academic Centre Art Department 1921.

ARVATOV, BORIS IGNATEVICH (1896-1940)

Art and literary critic, member of Proletkult (qv), chairman of Inkhuk (qv), editor of *Lef* (qv) and *Novy Lef* (qv). Advocate of 'formalist-sociological' method of literary criticism. Worked for IZO (qv).

ASEEV, NIKOLAI NIKOLAEVICH (1889-1963)

Poet, member of Moscow Centrifuge Futurist group with Pasternak (qv) and Bobrov (qv) 1913-1916, of Vladivostok Futurist group Tvorchestvo (Creative Work) with Chuzhak (qv) and Tretyakov (qv) 1918-1920, of *Lef* (qv) and *Novy Lef* (qv). Left *Novy Lef* in 1928 with Mayakovsky (qv) to found Ref.

BABEL, ISAAK EMMANUILOVICH (1894-1941)

Short-story writer, author of *Red Cavalry* and *Tales of Odessa*, contributor to *Lef* (qv), arrested in 1930's, death 1941.

BABICHEV, ALEKSEI VASILEVICH (1887-1963)

Painter and sculptor, contributor to the World of Art (qv) exhibitions of 1913 and 1917, follower of Cézanne, later Constructivist. Taught at Vkhutemas (qv), head of the Group of Objective Analysis at Inkhuk (qv), conciliator between easel and production trends.

BENOIS, ALEKSANDR NIKOLAEVICH (1870-1960)

Painter, stage designer and art historian, founder member of World of Art (qv). Worked with Diaghilev ballet, director of Picture Gallery of Hermitage 1918-1925. From 1926 lived in Paris retaining Soviet citizenship.

BLACKSMITHY (KUZNITSA)

Moscow group of proletarian poets and writers, ex-members of Proletkult (qv) 1920-1931.

BOBROV, SERGEI PAVLOVICH (1889-1971)

Poet, literary critic and mathematician, member of Moscow Futurist group Centrifuge 1913-1916, close friend of Pasternak (qv).

BOGDANOV, ALEKSANDR ALEKSANDROVICH (Malinovsky, 1873-1928)

Politician, Machist philosopher, scientist. Opposed Lenin on the question of Bolsheviks' participation in the Tsarist Duma (Parliament). Organised *Vpered* group and Capri and Bologna Party Schools, expelled from the party in 1919. Founder of Proletkult (qv), after its subordination to Narkompros (qv) in 1920 withdrew from politics, died in his clinic after experimenting on himself.

BURLYUK, DAVID DAVIDOVICH (1882-1967), **VLADIMIR** (1888-1917) and **NIKOLAI** (1890-1920)

Family of Futurist poets and painters, members of Hylaea group. Vladimir was killed in the War, Nikolai in the Civil War. David in Vladivostok 1918, member of Tvorchestvo Futurist group, in Japan 1920-22, USA from 1922 to his death.

CHAGALL, MARC (b 1887)

Painter, stage designer. Born in Vitebsk. While working in Paris contributed to exhibitions of Larionov's (qv) group 1911-1914. Returned to Russia before the First World War, organised Vitebsk Art School but was soon ousted by Malevich (qv). Worked with Jewish Kamerny theatre in Moscow, left Russia in 1922.

CHUZHAK, NIKOLAI (Nasimovich, 1876-1939)

Member of Vladivostok Futurist group Tvorchestvo (Creative Work) 1918-20, editor of *Lef* (qv) and *Novy Lef* (qv), editor of volume *Literature of Fact*, 1928, arrested 1938-9.

EIKHENBAUM, BORIS (1886-1959)

- Formalist critic, member of Opoyaz (qv), author of studies on classical and modern Russian literature. 113
- EISENSTEIN, SERGEI MIKHAILOVICH (1898-1948)
Russian film director, member of Proletkult (qv) 1917-20, scene-painter and director for Proletkult theatre, directed Tretyakov's *Gas-masks* 1923 (qv), first film *Strike* in 1924, then *Battleship Potëmkin* (1926), *October* (1928), *The General Line* (1929), trip to USA and Mexico 1929-32, later films *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) and the two parts of *Ivan the Terrible* (1944 and '46).
- EHRENBERG, ILYA GRIGOREVICH (1891-1963)
Novelist, poet, journalist. Lived in Paris from 1909, returned to Russia after the revolution, but left it again in the 'twenties. In 1922 published with El Lisstsky a Constructivist journal *Veshch/Gegenstand/Objet*, Berlin. Returned to Russia, became a prominent writer and public figure.
- GABO, NAUM (Pevzner, b 1890)
Constructivist artist, changed his name to avoid confusion with his brother Anton Pevzner (qv). Held an anti-production-art position in Inkhuk (qv). Left Russia in 1922, since 1933 has been living in England.
- GAN, ALEKSEI
Member of Constructivist group in Inkhuk (qv), editor of *Kino-fot*, 1922, published a booklet *Constructivism*, 1922, Tver.
- GONCHAROVA, NATALI SERGEEVNA (1881-1962)
Painter, wife of Larionov (qv), member of the group Knave of Diamonds (Bubnovy Valet). Left Russia with her husband in 1915 to work with Diaghilev in Paris.
- GORKY, MAKSIM (Aleksei Maksimovich Peshkov, 1868-1936)
Self-taught Russian writer, specialist in low-life themes, Bolshevik, member of *Vpered* group 1908-9, editor of *Letopis* and *Novaya Zhizn* in Petrograd 1913-17. Hostile to October Revolution, made peace with Soviets 1918, left Russia 1921, lived abroad until 1932 apart from brief visits in 1928 and 1930, returned permanently in 1932, helped organise Union of Soviet Writers (qv).
- GOSIZDAT
State publishing house, organ of Narkompros (qv) 1918, autonomous body within Narkompros from May 1919, first head Vorovsky.
- GURO, ELENA (Elena Geneikhovna von Notenberg, 1877-1913)
Russian Futurist poet and prose writer, member of Hylaea group.
- INBER, VERA MIKHAILOVNA (1890-1973)
Poet, member of Literary Centre of Constructivists (1923-1930) with Selvinsky, Zelinsky, Lugovskoi, Bagritsky, left constructivist movement in the late 1920s.
- INKHUK (1920-1924)
Institute of Artistic Culture, founded in Moscow under the auspices of IZO (qv), branches set up in Petrograd (led by Tatlin, qv) and Vitebsk (led by Malevich, qv), dominated by Constructivists and production-artists. Kandinsky (qv) drafted its initial programme, which was rejected by other members.
- IZO
Arts department of Narkompros (qv), founded 1918, initially headed by Shterenberg (qv) in Petrograd and Tatlin (qv) in Moscow, dominated by Futurists, suprematists and constructivists.
- KAMENSKY, VASILY VASILIEVICH (1884-1961)
Futurist poet, member of Hylaea group, author of *Stenka Razin* (1915), supporter of October Revolution, member of *Lef* (qv) and in the circus section of TEO (qv).
- KANDINSKY, VASSILY (1886-1944)
Russian artist, member of Munich Blaue Reiter group, contributor to

- the Knave of Diamonds exhibitions 1910 and 1912 (qv), member of IZO (qv) art collegium 1918, founder member of Inkhuk (qv) 1920, teacher in Vkhutemas (qv), emigrated to Germany and joined Bauhaus 1922.
- KHLEBNIKOV, VELIMIR** (Viktor Vladimirovich, 1885-1922)
Futurist poet, member of Hylaea group, pioneer of 'trans-sense' poetry.
- KHRISANF** (for poetry), **M ROSSIIANSKY** (for criticism)
(Zak Lev Vasilevich, b 1892)
Poet, artist, literary critic, member of Moscow Futurist group Mezzanine of Poetry, founded 1913 with Shershenevich (qv).
- KIRSANOV, SEMYON ISAKOVICH** (1906-1972)
Poet, member of *Lef* (qv) and *Novy Lef* (qv).
- KOGAN, PYOTR SEMENOVICH** (1872-1932)
Literary historian and critic.
- KOZLINSKY, V. I.**
Artist, took part in Altman's (qv) decoration of Petrograd for the first anniversary of the October Revolution in 1918.
- KRUCHENYKH, ALEKSEI ELISEEVICH** (1886-c 1965)
Futurist poet, member of Hylaea group before World War One, member of 41° group in Tiflis 1917-19, pioneer of 'trans-sense' poetry, member of *Lef* (qv), editor of Khlebnikov's works.
- KRUG**
Publishing house, founded in 1922 to bring together writers of different literary groups, dominated by 'fellow-travellers', first chairman Voronsky (qv).
- KRZHIZHANOVSKY, G M**
Organiser of electrical industry and president of Gosplan until 1924.
- KULBIN, NIKOLAI IVANOVICH** (1868-1917)
Artist, medical doctor, professor at the Military Academy, champion of avant-garde art, sponsor of many modernist art exhibitions.
- KUSHNER, BORIS ANISIMOVICH** (1888-1937)
Linguist and critic, founder member of Opoyaz (qv), cubo-futurist poet, member of Centrifuge group 1913-16, editor of *Art of the Commune* 1918, of *Lef* (qv) 1923-5, of *Novy Lef* (qv) 1927-8, member of Litfront (qv) 1928-30.
- LARIONOV, MIKHAIL FEDOROVICH** (1881-1964)
Painter, founder of Rayonist style, contributed to Knave of Diamonds (Bubnovy Valet) exhibitions, husband of Goncharova (qv). Left Russia in 1915 to work with Diaghilev in Paris.
- LAVINSKY, ANTON**
Architect, sculptor and stage designer, editor of *Lef* (qv) 1923-5, *Novy Lef* (1927-8), worked for ROSTA (qv) 1919-20, member of Inkhuk (qv), productivist.
- LE DANTIEU, MIKHAIL VASILEVICH** (?-1917)
Artist, member of Larionov's group (qv), contributed to Ass's Tail, 1912, and Target, 1913, exhibitions.
- LEF**
Left Front of the Arts and its magazine, published 1923-5, members included Mayakovsky (qv), Aseev (qv), Tretyakov (qv), Brik (qv), Kushner (qv), Arvatov (qv), Lavinsky (qv) and others.
- LUNACHARSKY, ANATOLY VASILIEVICH** (1875-1933)
Social-Democrat from 1899, joined Bolsheviks in 1904, member of *Vpered* group with Gorky (qv) and Bogdanov (qv) 1908, rejoined Bolsheviks in August 1917. Commissar for Education in the Soviet government 1917-29. Head of Narkompros (qv).
- MAKLETSOV, SERGEI NIKOLAEVICH** (b 1892)
Artist, took part in the decoration of Petrograd for the first anniversary of the October Revolution in 1918, organised by Altman (qv).

MALEVICH, KASIMIR (1878-1935)

Painter, contributed to first Knave of Diamonds (qv) and Ass's Tail (qv) exhibitions. Founder of suprematism 1916. Taught at Vkhutemas (qv) and at Vitebsk (Unovis) 1919. Director of Moscow Museum of Artistic Culture 1922-28. Buried in a constructivist coffin of his own design.

MAPP see VAPP

MARINETTI, FILIPPO TOMMASO (1876-1944)

Italian Futurist, published first Futurist manifesto 1909, visited Russia 1914 but was hostilely received by most Russian Futurists, joined Fascist movement 1919, left 1920, rejoining 1923 or 1924, to become secretary of the Italian Union of Writers 1929. Went to fight on the Russian front 1942, returned to Italy the following year where he died of a heart attack. Author of *Zang Tumb Tuuum* (1914), etc.

MAYAKOVSKY, VLADIMIR VLADIMIROVICH (1893-1930)

Futurist poet, member of Hylaea group, rallied to the October Revolution in 1918, worked for IZO (qv), then for ROSTA (qv) 1919-22, contributed to *Art of the Commune*, edited *Lef* (qv) and *Novy Lef* (qv). Split from Lef in 1928 with Brik and Aseev, founding REF (Revolutionary Front of the Arts). Joined RAPP (see VAPP) 1930, committed suicide April 14, 1930. Wrote several plays and filmscripts as well as poetry, and acted in a number of films, notably Slavinsky's *The Lady and the Hooligan* (1918) and Turkin's *Shackled by Film* (1918), to his own scenario.

MEYERHOLD, VSEVOLOD EMILEVICH (1874-1942)

Theatrical producer, worked in Moscow Arts, Kommisarshevskaya and Petersburg Imperial Theatres before the War, recognised Soviet government after October, headed Petrograd TEO 1918-May 1919, did propaganda work in South Russia during the Civil War, becoming a Communist in 1920. Returned to Moscow the same year, became head of TEO, proclaimed 'October in the Theatre'. Resigned in 1921 when his radical policies failed. Worked in Moscow theatres according to the method of 'bio-mechanics'. Returned to a more classical style with *The Government Inspector* (1926). His theatre closed in 1938, arrested 1939, died in prison 1942.

MOSCOW LINGUISTIC CIRCLE

Group of linguists, folklorists and formalist critics founded 1915, its members included Pëtr Bogatyrev, Roman Jakobson and Grigorii Vinokur (qv).

NARKOMPROS

People's Commissariat of Education, the Soviet State Department dealing with education and the arts, headed by Lunarcharsky (qv) 1917-29.

NOVY LEF

Journal founded by Mayakovsky (qv) to replace *Lef* (qv) in 1927-28 issues, edited after July 1928 by Tretyakov (qv).

OPOYAZ

Society for the Study of Poetic Language, founded in St Petersburg 1916, its members included Lev Yakubinsky (qv), E V Polivanov (qv), Viktor Shklovsky (qv), Boris Eikhenbaum (qv), S I Bernstein and Osip Brik (qv), joined by Jury Tynyanov (qv) in the early 1920s. One of the two centres of formalist criticism, the other being the Moscow Linguistic Circle (qv).

PASTERNAK, BORIS NIKOLAEVICH (b 1869)

Poet, member of Moscow Futurist Group Centrifuge 1913-16, editor of *Lef* (qv) and *Novy Lef*.

PEREVAL (CROSSING)

Literary group and a periodical attached to the magazine *Red Virgin Soil* (*Krasnaya Nov'*) 1923-1932, edited by Voronsky (qv).

Constructivist artist, belonged to the anti-production-art group in Inkhuk (qv), brother of Naum Gabo (qv), left Russia in 1922, did stage designs for Diaghilev ballet.

POLIVANOV, EVGENY DMITRIEVICH (1891-1938)

Scholar, linguist, orientalist, founder member of Opoyaz (qv).

POLONSKY, VYACHESLAV PAVLOVICH (Gusin, 1886-1932)

Art and literary critic, editor of *Press and Revolution (Pechat' i Revoliutsia)* 1921-1929, supported traditionalist 'fellow-traveller'-writers.

POPOVA, LYUBOV (1889-1924)

Painter in Knave of Diamonds group, later Constructivist and Productivist. Active in Inkhuk (qv), teacher in Vkhutemas (qv), theatre designs for Meyerhold (qv).

PROLETKULT

Association of proletarian cultural organisations, founded formally October 1917 with the aim of creating a proletarian culture to replace the existing bourgeois culture. Main theorists A A Bogdanov (qv), F I Kalinin, P I Lebedev (later a member of VAPP, qv), P M Kerzhentsev. Reached its peak in 1920 after which it was reorganised as a department of Narkompros (qv), then declined, finally losing even Narkompros support in 1922.

PUDOVKIN, VSEVOLOD ILLARIONOVICH (1893-1953)

Film director, pupil of Lev Kuleshov. Main works: *Mechanism of the Brain*, 1925, adaptation of Gorky's (qv) novel *Mother*, 1926, *The End of St. Petersburg*, 1927, *Storm over Asia*, 1928, with Brik's scenario.

PU(G)NI, IVAN ALBERTOVICH (1894-1956)

Suprematist painter, follower of Malevich (qv), financed Tramway 5 exhibition 1915, contributed to *Art of the Commune*, emigrated 1920.

PUNIN, NIKOLAI NIKOLAEVICH (1883-1953)

Art critic, member of IZO (qv) 1918, editor of *Art of the Commune*.

RAPP

See VAPP.

RODCHENKO, ALEKSANDR (1891-1956)

Painter, Suprematist under Malevich's (qv) influence 1915, member of IZO (qv) 1918, member of Inkhuk (qv) 1920, taught at Vkhutemas (qv) 1921, member of Obmokhu, the Society of Young Artists, constructivist, productivist, typography for Vertov's (qv) films and *Lef* (qv) and *Novy Lef* (qv), sets and costumes for Meyerhold 1929-31.

ROSTA

Russian Telegraph Agency, responsible for propaganda during the Civil War, employed Mayakovsky (qv), Tseremnykh, Ivanov, Kerzhentsev and others to make the hand-copied posters for display in shop windows known as 'Rosta Windows' 1919-22.

SEVERYANIN (Igor-Severyanin, Igor Vasilievich Lotarev, 1887-1941)

Poet leader of the 'ego-futurist' group of St Petersburg 1911-14, more cosmopolitan and Bohemian than Hylaea.

SHERSHENEVICH, VADIM GABRIELEVICH (1893-1942)

Futurist poet, member of Mezzanine of Poetry (qv), supporter of Marinetti (qv) in Russia, member of imagist movement 1917-27, worked for film industry in late 1920's.

SHKLOVSKY, VIKTOR BORISOVICH (b 1893)

Formalist critic, founder-member of Opoyaz (qv), in emigration 1922-3, editor of *Novy Lef* (qv), worked in the literary department of Sevkinio in late 1920's, author of *A Sentimental Journey* (1923) and many other works, including filmscripts, eg, for Kuleshov's *By the Law* (1926).

SHKOLNIK, IOSIF SOLOMONOVICH (1883-1926)

Artist, secretary of the artist's group Union of Youth, 1910-1914, contributed to Ass's Tail, 1912, and Target, 1913, exhibitions.

SHTERENBERG, DAVID PETROVICH (1881-1948)

- Artist, first head of IZO Narcompros (qv) 1918-1921, contributed to *Art of the Commune*. Left Budist before the revolution. 117
- SOLOGUB, FYODOR KUZMICH (Teternikov, 1863-1927)
Symbolist poet and prose writer.
- SOMOV, KONSTANTIN ANDRREVICH (1869-1939)
World of Art (qv) painter.
- STENBERG BROTHERS
Constructivist artists, members of Obmokhu (Society of Young Artists), designed posters and cinema and theatrical advertisements.
- STEPANOVA, VARVARA (1894-1958)
Painter, contributor to Knave of Diamonds 1910-11, Vice-Director of art and literature department of IZO (qv) 1920, worked with Popova (qv) in Tsindel textile factory and designed costumes for Meyerhold (qv) in 1922, contributed to *Lef* (qv) 1923, head of textile department of Vkhutemas (qv) 1924, designed the magazine *Sovetskoye Kino* and cinema sets 1927. Wife of Rodchenko (qv).
- TARABUKIN
Art critic, champion of production art, contributed to *Lef* (qv).
- TATLIN, VLADIMIR EVGRAPOVICH (1885-1953)
Painter and sculptor, exhibited with Larionov and Malevich (qv) in Union of Youth exhibition 1911, Ass's Tail and Knave of Diamonds 1912, Counter-reliefs 1913, Tramway 5 1915, Head of Moscow IZO (qv) 1918, taught at Vkhutemas (qv) and Vkhutein, works include Project for a Monument to the Third International (1920) and Letatlin (1931).
- TOMASHEVSKY, BORIS VIKTOROVICH (1890-1957)
Formalist critic, member of Moscow Linguistics Circle (qv), first studies on statistical metrics, expert on Pushkin.
- TRETYAKOV, SERGEI MIKHAILOVICH (1892-1939?)
Originally Futurist poet, member of group Mezzanine of Poetry 1913, in Baku and Tiflis 1917, member of the Vladivostok Futurist group Tvorchestvo ('Creative Work') 1918-20, in Chita 1920, in Moscow by 1922 where he participated in *Lef* (qv) and *Novy Lef* (qv) as a critic and theorist, wrote plays for Meyerhold (qv) and Eisenstein (qv) including *Gasmasks* (1924), *Listen Moscow!* (1924) and *Roar China!* (1930). Continued to edit *Novy Lef* after Mayakovsky (qv) left to form REF. Arrested in 1937, the exact date of his death shortly thereafter is unknown, posthumously rehabilitated.
- TINYANOV, YURY NIKOLAEVICH (1894-1943)
Formalist critic, member of Opoyaz (qv), teacher at Leningrad Institute of Art History 1921-30, author of historical novels and scenarios for Kozintsev's *The Cloak* (1926) and *SVD* (1927), and Feinzimmer's *Lt Kizhé* (1934) from his own novel.
- UNION OF PEASANT WRITERS (All-Union of Peasant Writers)
Peasant equivalent of VAPP (qv), and RAPP, allied with it in Federation of Organisations of Soviet Writers (FOSP), dissolved with RAPP into Union of Soviet Writers (qv) in 1932.
- UNION OF SOVIET WRITERS
General organisation of Soviet Writers set up in 1934 to replace RAPP, UPW, etc.
- VAPP
All-Union Association of Proletarian Writers, founded 1920 by descendants of Proletkult (qv), journal *On Guard*, dominated by Lelevich, Vardin and Rodov; more moderate leadership after 1925 including Averbakh, Libedinsky, Kizshon and Ermilov, journal became *On Literary Guard*. Reorganised as RAPP (Russian APP) in 1928, controversy with left groups (Litfront, Lef, qv). Dissolved to form Union of Soviet Writers (qv) 1932.
- VERTOV, DZIGA (Denis Azkadyevich Kaufman, 1896-1954)

Film director, newsreel and propaganda films for Red Army during Civil War, Kino-Pravda documentaries 1922-5, participated in *Lef* (qv) and *Novy Lef* (qv) *Kino-glaz* (1925), *One Sixth of the Earth* (1926), *Stride Soviet!* (1926), *The Man with the Movie Camera* (1931), *Donbas Symphony* (1934) and *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934), etc.

VESNIN, LEONID ALEKSANDROVICH (1880-1933), VIKTOR (1882-1950) and ALEKSANDR (1883-1950)

Architects, Aleksandr also a stage designer, member of Inkhuk (qv). All three brothers taught at Vkhutemas (qv) 1921-5, designs include Palace of Soviets competition entry 1923, Pravda building design 1924 and Lenin Library project 1928-9. Founder member of OSA (Association of Contemporary Architects) 1925.

VINOKUR, GRIGORY OSIPOVICH (1896-1947)

Linguist, member Moscow Linguistics Circle (qv) 1915-19.

VKHUTEMAS

Moscow School of applied arts and Higher Technical-Artistic Studios, teachers included Tatlin (qv), Malevich (qv), Kandinsky (qv), Rosanova and Pevsner (qv).

VORONSKY, ALEKSANDR KONSTANTINOVICH (1884-1943)

Editor of 'thick' periodical *Kransnaya Nov'* (Red Virgin Soil) 1921-7, supporter of 'fellow-travelling' writers (Esenin, Pilnyak, Ivanov, Tikhonov, etc.), opponent of *On Guardists* and VAPP (qv). Expelled from CPSU(B) for Trotskyism and banished to Siberia 1927, recanted and returned to Moscow 1930, arrested and executed about 1943, posthumously rehabilitated.

WORLD OF ART

Group of painter in St Petersburg at the end of the nineteenth century, included Benois (qv), Dobuzhinsky, Somov (qv), and others, as well as Diaghilev, who sponsored their magazine, *The World of Art* (1899-1904). See N N Sokolova, *Mir Iskusstva*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1934.

YAKUBINSKY, LEV (?-1946)

Formalist critic, member of Opoyaz (qv) 1916, joined CPSU (B) 1917.

ZDANEVICH, ILYA MIKHAILOVICH (b 1894)

Russian Futurist, born Tiflis, friend of Larionov (qv) and Goncharova (qv) 1913, member of Tiflis Futurist group 41° 1917-20, exile in Paris since early 1920's. Author of *Pentalogy aslaablichya*.

ZHIRMUNSKY, VIKTOR MAKSIMOVICH (b 1889)

Formalist critic, deviated from 'orthodox' formalism, author of studies on classical and modern Russian literature.

ZUBOV, VALENTIN PLATONOVICH, Count (b 1884)

Founder of Russian Institute of History of Art in Petersburg. Worked under Provisional Government in commission for evacuation of art treasures, continued in this work under Bolsheviks. Quickly established contact with Lunacharsky. Unwilling emigration in 1925.

This glossary includes relevant entries from the one which appeared in *Screen* v 12, no 4, Winter 1971-2. Where necessary these have been revised and expanded.

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Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen

interviewed by Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen

Credits: *Direction, production and script:* Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen; *Camera and lighting:* Louis Castelli; *Sound and portapak:* Larry Söder; *Production co-ordinator:* Sharon Russell; *Titles and animation:* Don Lembeck; with Debra Dolnansky and Michael Thomas (together with the Northwestern University Mime Company directed by Bud Beyer); Peter Wollen and Grace McKeaney.

16 mm; Eastman 7242; standard ratio; 95 mins.

Description:

Each section of the film is in one continuous take: ie, two reels added together with an 'invisible' junction.

Section 1: A mime of Kleist's *Penthesilea*,¹ shot with a static camera at a fixed distance.

Section 2: Peter Wollen speaks/reads the words of the directors. As his speech develops, the camera gradually disengages itself from the speaker and weaves a complex web around him/independent of him. At times, the camera picks up cue cards from which the speech was read, but sometimes the text on the cards is not identical to the spoken text.

Section 3: A complex arrangement of images of paintings, sculptures, bas-reliefs, comic strips, etc on the theme of the Amazons. The transitions are effected with animated wipes and maskings. The sound track presents the 'birth' of a new form of language.

Section 4: An early silent film called *What 80 Million Women Want*,² superimposed on a medium close-up – in colour – of a woman's face. The woman speaks the words of the feminist Jessie Ashley.³ At various points the sound track is taken over by the sound of machinery and women's voices talking indistinctly.

Section 5: The screen-image contains four video images. Each video image presents one of the four preceding sections. However, a fifth tape has been added and sometimes displaces one of the other video tapes. In the fifth tape, the camera circles around the stage-performance of the mime and adds images of the *Penthesilea*-actress taking off her make-up and addressing the camera. The film-image occasionally zooms in on one of the four video images, and the sound track contains similar 'zooms' in on accompanying sound tracks of the four first sections.

What were the conditions which produced the conception of the film?

Laura Mulvey: Really a combination of circumstances. Peter was teaching in America in the film department at Northwestern University near Chicago, which meant that we could use equipment for free and work with students who had a certain experience of film-making and could produce basic technical skills. That was the practical beginning. Also that Peter was earning enough money to make the thing just financially viable. But all that wouldn't have been decisive if we hadn't felt that we *should* make a film, that we'd got to a point where it was the logical thing to do if at all practically possible. This was partly because we have both a very strong background and formation in Hollywood movies and had only very recently started to get into experimental film. Really only in the last couple of years. This meant that it was possible to make a movie within one's own current of interest, try to make an intervention of a kind, which would have been totally impossible if one's mind was still dominated by 35mm narrative film. At the same time we wanted to be pretty ambitious within our very obvious limitations; the film would have to try really to experiment as well as just being within an experimental tradition. So the decision to film without conventional editing was basic from the beginning, especially – I think – as Peter had been working on editing and point of view. And I'd been working on identification and voyeurism, especially in terms of political film-making.

The starting-off point was always Kleist's play *Penthesilea*. I think what happened was that we read somewhere that G W Pabst had meant to make a movie of *Penthesilea* starring Leni Riefenstahl, which turned out to be inaccurate information because she wanted to do it herself. The play interested us for various reasons. For one thing, Peter had just found the Ernest Jones essay on dying together⁴ which is about Kleist's extraordinary life, or rather death. Also I was interested at the time in male phantasies of women, coming out of my work on fetishism and Allen Jones. So it was the psychoanalytical aspects of the story which appealed to us first of all. Also we wanted to make a film about a story, rather than a film of a story, so it was an advantage that this was a story that had been told many times and had been changed radically by Kleist so that this other meaning came out . . . ie, the fact that the woman killed the man rather than the man killing the woman; this changed the psychological implications of the story. Then obviously the whole concept of the Amazons is interesting from the point of view of women now. Women being so mythless; lacking myths of their own, looking to the Amazons as one of the few myths of strong women that actually exist. We

122 wanted to hold onto that and to go into it in more detail, trying to find out whether it was a feminist myth or whether it was a kind of male phantasy myth. All that appealed to us and we started reading up on it, looking into work that had been done such as Bachofen.⁵ The interesting thing about the Amazons for women is that they appear as a society of women outside of male society. But also as women in struggle, they carry spears and fight and ride horses, and have very phallic connotations. They appear like the idealised image a sexist society has of men/women – of phallic women. At the same time, the whole mystique Kleist goes into, of dying together is very much a return to the idea of the strong woman as the mother. It has two sides to it, both that of the phallic woman and that of the mother.

Peter Wollen: Also in the history of the myth, looking back, you have that link between Freud and Engels. The Amazons in the light of the mythological history which Bachofen produces are a kind of last ditch resistance against the institution of patriarchal law. So, apart from being mythological beings in themselves, they also occupy a special place in mythological history.

LM: The idea being that they were defending the mother goddesses and the earth goddesses of the lost matriarchal world, which Bachofen saw as preceding the patriarchal world but having to give way to it. The reason being that the matriarchal world stood for emotion, blood-ties, religion and so on, while the patriarchal world stood for law, the state, the individual. According to him, civilisation couldn't exist until matriarchy had been defeated by the patriarchal world, and he traces this back through mythological history, seeing the Amazons as the last ditch resistance of matriarchy. Actually, it is more ambiguous, as he has two different views about the Amazons, but there it gets too complicated to go into.

PW: Effectively Bachofen was the kind of founding father of all that strain of mythical anthropology that comes out in Frazer's *Golden Bough* and in *Totem and Taboo* and finally in Lèvi-Strauss.

So in fact the film was produced by something of a collision between Kleist, Bachofen, Ernest Jones, Allen Jones and the Amazons?

LM: I suppose so. What a strange thought!

What was the material basis for the film? You've already mentioned that Northwestern had the equipment, but what about the rest?

PW: Right, the means of production. The basic equipment we used we could get for free because it belonged to the film division. We had to hire just one or two things they didn't have or which weren't there at the time. The money for the film came out of my salary. We had no grant or anything. It cost about \$5,000 and all of that we paid for ourselves.

In what way did the conditions of production determine the nature of the text? For instance, was the elimination of editing primarily due to financial considerations, such as the need for a low shooting ratio? Or were you actually trying to exploit the limitations of the conditions you had to work in? 123

LM: No. You can't really say which came first. The film existed in those terms and we wanted to make a film that was of formal interest and that was about film making as well as about all those things we were talking about earlier.

PW: Yes. The idea of doing a film without editing had an autonomous history in the way we had been thinking about film anyway. Besides which, it's also the most rational way of making a film with those very limited resources. There were things we originally hoped to do but which we had to drop. For instance, in the cinema section, ie, section four, we had wanted to use an optical printer, but we couldn't get access to one, so in the end it was just a simple A and B roll printing, a simple superimposition.

LM: Another thing about the practical circumstances was the fact that the equipment at Northwestern was under very heavy use. There were a lot of students wanting to use it, so we had to fit in with the schedule available. That meant that a shooting ratio as near as possible to one to one was necessary for our purposes, both from the point of view of money and time, but also because we would only have access to the equipment a very limited amount of time on odd days. So if we had wanted to shoot in a higher ratio, it would have been extremely difficult to do re-shooting because we wouldn't have been able to get at the equipment again for another fortnight or so. So in that sense, it was very important to have things incredibly carefully worked out in advance and to be quite sure of getting it right.

Is there any part of the film which looks substantially different from the way you had originally planned it? Things you had to change because of the lack of equipment and time?

PW: The original idea for the pro-filmic event of the first section being theatre, the second verbal language, the third plastic arts, and then film and finally video, it would have made sense to use an optical printer for the film section, because that's what an optical printer is. It is specific to film as a medium. But as we couldn't get one, we devised the fourth section in another way. Was there anything in particular you had in mind when asking that question?

Yes, for instance in section two, you might have wanted to use tracks rather than a hand-held camera. If you had the money, would you have preferred to create an impression of a disembodied, almost autonomously moving camera?

PW: The hand-held nature of the second section is first of all in

124 contrast to the first section, because there the camera is completely stable and doesn't move at all. So it isn't just a question of the kind of camera movement you could get by using tracks, but the fact that with a hand-held camera you get multiple movements. There are the shakes of the camera as well. On the other hand, we also wanted the contrast between the normal *vérité* style of film making and a style which, although clearly hand-held, showed that it had been very carefully choreographed.

So in fact the second section of the film, the section dealing with verbal language and writing, has overtones of the caméra-stylo in it.

PW: Right.

How important was the fact that you made the film in America? Would it have been different if you had been in England and had access to the same equipment here?

LM: I don't know. Our main working situation was discussion together which went on for months and months. We had hours and hours of seemingly useless discussions which in the end no doubt came in usefully somewhere. In that sense, although we worked closely with the people around us, we didn't actually change our concept. The working out of it was essentially ours. We did get a fantastic amount of feedback and advice on the technical side, but the ideas, the construction of the film came out of discussions Peter and I had.

What about the speech in section four? Was that speech selected because of the American cultural situation? It occurred to us that the choice of the myth of the Amazons, or rather the way you juxtapose the myth of the Amazons with the political speech in section four might perhaps relate to certain trends in the Women's Movement which are particularly dominant in America.

PW: You mean Jill Johnston and the radical lesbians, trends like that?

The juxtaposition seems to be thought in terms of a specific intervention in an American cultural situation.

LM: We really did want the speech in section four to be American. That is quite true. For one thing, it was going to be spoken by an American anyway. But regarding the problems raised by Jessie Ashley's speech, I would have been thinking more about my own contacts with the political aspects of the movement, and, obviously, my experience of the Women's Movement is primarily in England.

PW: On the other hand, there is a tradition of a kind of woman's suffrage in America, such as the Equal Rights Amendment campaign for instance, which is precisely going to legislators, asking

for their votes. So that in a sense the speech can be seen as relating to that American situation, because in that context there is a need to state the case for class politics.

LM: Yes, one could say that. The Women's Movement in America as well as having a very radical section, also has a fantastically strong section inside the establishment ideology. Much more than in England. And although written a long time ago, Jessie Ashley's speech deals with these kind of problems.

PW: But actually, one of the difficulties of the film for an American audience is precisely the aspect of class politics. That really presents a lot of problems for them. That is why it is also important that the speech should be American, because if you had Europeans saying the things Jessie Ashley says, eg, Sylvia Pankhurst or somebody like that, then they would be liable to think: well, that's just Europeans who talk about class politics like that. While, since it was actually an American from the history of the American movement, this speech poses these problems in a much more real way for Americans.

LM: To the women in the Movement here in England who have seen the film, that is the sequence which has moved them most, but people in America didn't mention it. They would say they liked this sequence or that one, but they never actually mentioned sequence four at all. Except one friend of mine who was working on suffrage history, and she was very interested by it. So in fact, although the speech is American, it is just as relevant to the situation here in England, although people here are perhaps less pessimistic than Jessie Ashley was.

How did you script the various sections?

PW: For the mime, we gave the mime-company a synopsis and they said they wanted to work it out for themselves first. After a while they came back and showed us what they wanted to do. We made one or two comments, but left it basically as they wanted it. In fact, now they have incorporated that mime into their repertory. So they now still do it as a stage performance and they're still working on it. It has changed quite a bit since they did it for the film. For the second section, the text was written and the camera movements were choreographed on paper for the camera man.

LM: Section three was carefully scripted. But to a certain extent, it has become difficult to see it now. Unless you know a terrific amount about the ancient Amazon legends, it is difficult to see precisely what the order of the pictures means. But there is a very definite system and structure in the arrangement of those images.

Yes, there is a chronological progression and also a narrative progression of the myth itself, and it tends to become a bit confusing.

126 PW: There is a problem there. You have the chronology of the myth in the sense that Heracles comes before Theseus and Theseus comes before Achilles. Then there is the chronology of the artists. But there is also the way the myth develops. The fourth section was basically a matter of timing.

LM: That section was scripted in the sense that we took the letters Jessie Ashley had written from Headquarters – there were four of them – and then we edited them together. The final section again was basically a matter of timing, and the fifth video tape in section four was also carefully scripted in terms of choreography of the camera and the performance of the actress.

Did you cut anything out?

PW: We were going to have more dialogue over the animation, talking about Bachofen and the various chains in the myth.

LM: The text was going to go into the ideological implications of the different versions of the myth of the Amazon fighters. The change in significance between Heracles fighting the Amazon queen Andromache, Theseus abducting his Antiope, and then Achilles and Penthesilea. All these have different ideological overtones and correspond to different historical phases: Heracles was a kind of lone male hero fighting all kinds of monsters and the Amazon queen was just one of these monsters. Theseus, who was regarded as the founding father of Athens, was a great patriarchal figure. He abducted the Amazon queen and took her for his wife. That obviously means something quite different from entering into battle with her. Anyway, the entire Amazon nation invaded Greece to rescue their queen and were defeated. So in this version you have the romantic involvement of king and queen and on the other hand the mass of the Amazons as a hostile, alien and barbaric horde, just like the centaurs or the Persians. The victory of the Greeks is seen as one of the great victories of civilisation over exterior barbaric forces, and the establishment of patriarchal supremacy. The Achilles and Penthesilea story is again different, because there the theme of necrophilia, of love for the dead woman is introduced.

How would you situate the intervention of your film? Within which and against which aesthetic traditions were you trying to intervene? If anywhere, I would see it as closer to Straub than to the more traditional forms of avant-garde such as the Anglo-Saxon avant-gardes, the New American Cinema and so on.

PW: It is closer to the American avant-gardes than Straub is. Although I would agree that the main current the film comes out of is the European avant-garde, eg, Straub-Huillet, and I would like to mention Jackie Raynal's film *Deux Fois* and Chantal Akerman's films. But there are also affinities with Yvonne Rainer's *Lives of*

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Performers and the films of Joyce Wieland, especially the more recent ones with a more political dimension, *Solidarity* and *Pierre Vallières*. In a way we sought a confusion of identity between 'Europe' and 'America' – we don't reject the New American Cinema as such, but we do reject its chauvinist adherents and spokesmen, and of course we have a contrasting philosophical and political background.

Nevertheless, the importance of language and the way it is used in your film is very different from the kind of irrational, mystic overtones of the Anglo-Saxon avant-gardes, such as Sharits, Wieland, Frampton and so on. I see your film as closer to a materialist conception of language such as, eg, modern French theories of writing.

PW: That's an absolutely false characterisation of those films. For instance, Hollis Frampton's *Zorns Lemma* (1971) is based on mathematical transformations in relation to the alphabet. . . .

Which again comes out of mysticism and Kabbala.

PW: But by that token Kabbalism is also very strong in, eg, Robbe-Grillet. I would say Kabbalism runs very strongly through all that French thought. You can see how, for instance, Jabès and Jewish thought feeds into Derrida.⁶ There is a very strong streak of Kabbalism in *Tel Quel*. You could look at the 'paragrammes'⁷ in that light too. Well, actually, that's a polemical statement. I would say that our film has a pronounced kinship of problematic with modern French theory such as *Tel Quel*. But I don't accept your statement that Joyce Wieland and *Zorns Lemma* are mystic and Kabbalistic. I see *Zorns Lemma* on the Straub side of the interface rather than the Brakhage side, though it does have a neo-Platonist aspect concerning light.

Maybe we should talk about that some other time. Your film appears to progress from theatre to video, from silent mime to direct speech. In view of the ideological connotations attached to the use of video at the present time, such as the notion of 'direct self-expression' and other populist notions, don't you think this progress to direct speech through the means of video is a dangerous strategy?

LM: The first thing one has to say is that the mime functions as a prologue: it is a run-through of the story, and the film in a sense uses the mime as a starting point. At any rate, the mime is not strictly speaking 'without speech'. It presents a repression of language rather than an absence. One of the things about Kleist's play is precisely the extraordinary quality of its language. Whenever people comment on Kleist's work, it is always about the marvellous quality of his literary language. So the absence of

128 language from a mime based on Kleist's *Penthesilea* takes on an extra dimension when seen in this context.

One of the things which interested me was the idea of repetition – ie, repetition of something in different forms, rather than a progression through various stages. The first sequence is a mime and therefore it has no manifest speech, but as I said earlier, verbal language is not merely absent from it, it is repressed. In the second sequence, you have the spoken word and the written word coinciding and acting against each other, blocking each other out at times. In the third sequence you have the written word of the titles and the inarticulate search for a new form of speech on the sound track. In the fourth section, you have the titles of the old silent film and speech, ie, Jessie Ashley's words, and mixed in, you have indistinct voices in the background which intermingle with the sound of machinery. In the fifth sequence you have all of that repeated, inaudible speech, spoken and written language etc. In that sense, there is an accumulation of elements rather than a progression.

The ideology of video users in general is that it connects with the possibility of direct speech, such as interviews and people 'speaking for themselves'. This position implies the notion of the subject, fully present in itself, assuming speech as a direct expression of the self. It seems that the ideology of expressivity is at work in the final part of the film, when the actress enounces the ability and need of women to 'speak with their own words'.

PW: No, not really. In a sense, it is an irony. Although she takes off her makeup to get access to verbal language, at the same time, when she does speak, it is clearly a performance. It is not 'her' speech. It is scripted, and she goes through it three times. Basically I think it is a banality.

LM: For instance. Debbie, the actress, was very concerned about the way she was supposed to say these last words. My main instruction to her was that if she was in front of the camera and being filmed, as a performer she knew that she was performing and that the scene was a continuation of the performance. In that sense, she could never be 'herself'. I liked the idea, in terms of the development of the film, ie, ending the film by going back to the beginning and then breaking out of the seeming circularity at the last moment. Again that goes back to my interest in repetition and, of course, she repeats her last words. . . . But probably more important is the whole thing about the presence and absence of language throughout the whole film and underlying it is a kind of women's questioning of language and the symbolic order and law.

PW: The question is: if we had a non-patriarchal symbolic order, what would the language be in that situation? What would the non-patriarchal 'word' be? And it is banal in the sense that we

didn't suggest that this language already exists, or that people already have access to it. It is a kind of banal statement that such a language could exist. 129

LM: A similar problem underlies the Jessie Ashley speech. One of the problems she puts forward is precisely her inability to be 'heard', in that she doesn't speak the language of the bourgeoisie but nevertheless she isn't heard by the working class. Her language isn't heard by either side. She can't find the language to be heard. She had started off in this very optimistic vein, thinking she only had to tell people and people would hear and see the obviousness of the manifest fact that the suffrage movement should align itself with the working class movement. Gradually she becomes more desperate and more isolated throughout the speech, ending in voluntary silence.

PW: And as far as the ideological relationship of language and video is concerned, what interested us, as indicated by the little quote about Freud's *Notes upon the Magic Writing Pad*,⁸ was the notion of video as a system of perception and memory, which Freud talks about in terms of erasure, re-cycling and so on. But this in terms of memory rather than speech. The video, in that it is so different from the mime at the beginning and yet it reproduces that mime, it is in a sense a form of remembering it.

Isn't there a possible contradiction between section two, which poses the problem of the dispersal of the subject, and sequences four and five which posit the need to find a new speech?

LM: There are two basic problems in the film. One is the question of phantasy and the other is the question of political practice. The new language can only be seen in terms of the question: how do you change language in order to change your political practice and how to use it to change phantasy as well, in terms of the symbolic order.

PW: The need to find a new language is not the same as calling for a new expressive speech. That is not the same problem. The question is whether the new order of language necessarily has to be attached to a patriarchal system. In relation to the myth of the Amazons, which is by definition a society without a patriarchal law, the film presents a critique of this myth, of the notion that the Amazons would be a completely separate order outside history. The question the film poses is: can that new symbolic law, of which the Amazon myth is in some respects a representation in phantasy, be inserted into history? That is the central problematic of the film, and the ending should be read in relation to that question. Video certainly is not seen as 'the new language', that would be a misunderstanding.

The Amazon society, which is supposed to operate outside the patriarchal law, is nevertheless founded on castration.

130 PW: Precisely. It turns out that the Amazon myth is a male phantasy. The Amazon society is situated in myth, and the myth is a male phantasy founded on castration. The question is: could it take place in history? Could the abolition of patriarchal law take place in history?

LM: Anyway, the film doesn't pretend to present a theory of the unconscious and history. It is a polemical film in that it is supposed to raise these questions in a direct manner.

PW: That is why I said earlier that there is a kinship of problematic between the film and the practice of *Tel Quel*. The film just does not give the same answer, but the problematic is similar. The film does not give any answer, in fact.

LM: Women have tried to recapture the myth of the Amazons. But in fact, what the myth celebrated was the defeat of women, the castration of women. But recently women have tried to recapture the myth for themselves, through identification with the Amazons. What the movie tries to do is to show that the myth is still within the patriarchal symbolic order. So the problem is not, can you recapture the myth through female identification, but can you conceive of a symbolic order which is non-patriarchal?

What is your interest in Leni Riefenstahl in this context?

LM: She was one of those who identified in a direct sense with the phallic woman. She identified in phantasy with Penthesilea. The irony of the Kleist story is that while it presents the image of the phallic woman, it also implies the whole male involvement with the mother and the return to the womb.

Do you see any possible contradiction between the theoretical elaboration of questions regarding the symbolic order and the fact that the film is tied to representation, which in a way militates to an extent against the elaboration of an essentially conceptual discourse?

PW: No, because the whole film, to my mind, poses the problem of film as a text rather than as pure representation, and to that extent the conceptualisations involved make such a theoretical discourse possible. Hopefully, people wouldn't fall into the way of looking at it as a representation, but as a text.

Don't you think this kind of text construction demands an enormous amount of work from the reader/viewer? Do you regard such demands as politically justified in view of the state of film culture at the present time?

PW: Originally, we wanted to put a bibliography at the end of the film, but we chickened out. . . .

LM: You wanted to. . . .

PW: . . . Regarding the theoretical problems, I would like to say two things. Firstly, regarding the state of political film. I think

you have to distinguish between three levels of political film, which is a classical distinction: films of agitation, propaganda and theory. All have different purposes and different audiences. Agitation is for a specific conjuncture and for a specific limited audience. Propaganda is aimed at a mass and presents a general kind of political line and broad ideas, and the theoretical film again is for a limited audience and a specific conjuncture but a theoretical conjuncture rather than an immediately political one. Theoretical films are for so to speak a 'cadre' audience. Obviously, most political films are either agitational or propagandist. To my mind, all three levels are necessary, although the problem of political film is often posed in terms of one as against the other.

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Secondly, I think it is wrong to pose the question in terms of the current state of political film making. One of the objects of the film, to my mind anyway, is to say that people should be prepared to make the same effort and approach a film in the same way as they would a book. It is a text, and just as when people read a book they are prepared to do further reading or they are prepared to encounter difficulties, so they should in a film. That is implicit in the transfer of the idea of reading.

LM: Yes, I agree with that. And also, what I think is very important about the film, is that it is not graspable as a single, enclosed unit, and it wasn't intended to be. In the second sequence, for instance, there are moments when, if you read the cue cards, you can't hear what Peter is saying, and you do sort of have to go in and out of it. And that, hopefully, is the case all through the film, as it's multi-layered and disharmonic, not a self-sufficient, self-enclosed whole. And I would hope that the film would be readable in different ways and that you wouldn't have to read it in all its endless implications and ramifications to make something out of it and to enjoy it.

PW: When I was talking about theory, propaganda and agitational films, I was talking in classical political terms, and I was implying that one could call our film a political film in the sense that one, for instance, would talk about Brecht as producing political texts. You can also argue that people like Lautreamont or Joyce or Duchamp were political in another sense, subversive or deconstructive, although they professed no interest in politics at all. And our film shows as much influence from, eg, Duchamp as it does from Brecht – perhaps more. So there are two different senses in which we can talk about it as a political film. Lautreamont's problematic or Duchamp's, wasn't political. Maybe the problematic of those who read Lautreamont is political, but in this film, the problematic inscribed in the film by the film-makers is political too.

Isn't there a problem regarding the 'cadre' audience, as you put it? The work of reading required is very specialised and not at all widely available. In fact, people who at the moment are able to

- 132 perform the reading work required, are, from the point of view of class politics, rather marginal. The best one could say is that they are politically progressive.

LM: It would be our bad luck if that were true. The film was made optimistically in the hope that it could make some sort of intervention. If it doesn't, then that would be too bad; and anyway, what do you mean by 'marginal'?

The kind of reading knowledge required is not as yet available except in very limited circles of intellectuals, and these circles are marginal in that they are outside the milieu at present actively involved in political film-making. The political effectiveness of such a strategy of text construction in that sense seems doubtful.

PW: You can say that the audience for that kind of film is marginal, but the problem is not marginal. So you begin with the problem, and you hope that the audience will find it, and enjoy it.

August 7th, 1974.

Notes

The film makers:

Laura Mulvey: author of: 'You don't know what is happening do you, Mr Jones?' (on Allen Jones) in *Spare Rib*, no 8, 1973; 'The Hole Truth' (on Penelope Slinger) in *Spare Rib*, no 17, 1973; co-editor of *Douglas Sirk* (together with Jon Halliday), Edinburgh Film Festival 1972; co-organiser of the Women's Event at the Edinburgh Film Festival 1972; wrote on film for *Seven Days*; member of the Family Study Group - Women's Liberation Workshop, London.

Peter Wollen: author of: *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, Cinema One Series, London 1969, revised edition 1972; 'Notes towards a structural analysis of the films of Samuel Fuller', in *Cinema* no 1, 1968; co-editor with David Will of *Samuel Fuller*, Edinburgh Film Festival 1969; 'Hitchcock's Vision', in *Cinema* no 3, 1969; 'Counter Cinema: Vent d'Est', in *After Image* no 4, 1972; 'Some thoughts on Stanley Mitchell's article on Marinetti and Mayakovsky', in *Screen* v 12 no 4; 'Art and Revolution' in *Studio International*, spring 1971; wrote on film for the *New Left Review* and *Seven Days*.

1. Heinrich von Kleist: (1777-1811); Prussian dramatist, poet, novelist and essayist. He stood in an ambiguous relation to the rest of the Romantic movement in Germany and his work remained largely unappreciated. He committed suicide together with his friend Lady Henriette Vogel. The critic Hermann Bahr wrote in 1927: 'During my childhood the memory of Kleist had been almost extinguished; in school we barely heard his name . . . his time came after 1870. But Kleist did not yet become popular. Only during the world war, indeed only after the war did the nation begin to recollect him, about the same time that there was the first glimmering of a Goethe-dawn.' (quoted by Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture*, Penguin Books, 1974, p 63). Peter Gay goes on to comment: 'Some readers found in Kleist the tormented Christian, others the aristocrat out of his time, still others a rebel; Thomas Mann enjoyed the delicious humour of Kleist's neo-classical comedy *Amphitryon*. The Nazis claimed Kleist as the pure, strong German, the George circle as

the poet of the lonely elite, the Communists as an early revolutionary, while his descendant, Hans Jürgen Kleist . . . insisted on his ancestor's right to be read as the 'singer of the war of liberation'. In 1920, a Kleist-Gesellschaft was founded in Germany, with members such as Gerhart Hauptmann, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Walter Hasenclever and Ernst Cassirer. Kleist's main plays: *Der zerbrochene Krug* (The broken jug), written 1802-06, premiere 1808; *Amphitryon*, written 1806, premiere 1899; *Penthesilea*, written 1806-07, premiere 1876. He also wrote a short story on the rebel Michael Kohlhaas (1808).

2. *What 80 Million Women Want*, a silent film featuring Mrs Pankhurst, produced by the Women's Political Union, in America (1913). Art director was Cedric Gibbons.
3. Jessie Ashley: American feminist. Obtained a degree in Law in 1902: In 1911-12 she wrote an irregularly appearing column in the main suffragist paper, *The Woman's Journal* (Boston) called 'Headquarters Letters'. In 1912 she submitted an article defending the textile workers' strike at Lawrence (Mass.) and protesting against the vicious repression of the strike, but the *Woman's Journal* saw fit not to publish it. She died prematurely in 1919. The directors of the film gave the following information to the actress who was to speak Jessie Ashley's words: 'Rich, professional, well-educated. Came into contact for the first time with working class women through the women's movement. Saw, both theoretically and emotionally, the need for the suffrage struggle to move beyond its immediate definition and, filled with rather naive but well founded enthusiasm devoted herself to pointing out to bourgeois-based suffragists that they were wrong both in terms of their struggle and where their future lay. Her failure to elicit much more than outraged protests gave her a double disappointment - the fact that her political project was obviously much more complicated than she had first envisaged, and personally in that she failed to convey her own sense of enthusiasm and idealism. And frustration, knowing she is right but quite unable to get through to everyone else. Although her style has an old-fashioned ring, women in women's movements in the sixties went through almost identical experiences, some of them coming to the same conclusions as Jessie Ashley without realising that it had all happened before'.
4. Ernest Jones: *On Dying Together: with special reference to Heinrich von Kleist's Suicide*, in *Essays in Applied Psychoanalysis*, International Psycho-analytic Library, London, 1951.
5. Johann Jakob Bachofen: (1815-1887); Swiss jurist and historian. Professor of Roman Law at Basle University. Published *Das Mutterrecht* (Mother-Right) in 1861. F Engels summarises the basic theses of the book in his preface to the 4th edition of *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 1891. Freud refers to Bachofen in *Totem and Taboo* (1913). Bachofen was also an influence on Nietzsche.
6. Jacques Derrida wrote an essay on this contemporary French poet: *Edmond Jabes et la question du livre* (1964), reprinted in *L'Ecriture et la Difference*, Paris 1967.
7. The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure wrote an analysis of Virgil's poetry and of Lucretius' *On the Nature of the Universe* (*De Rerum Natura*) to confirm his hypothesis that 'the poetic discourse makes obligatory usage of the phonemes of a theme-word which precedes and underpins this discourse. . . . The phonemes of the theme-word are obligatory relays through which the sound chain of the poetic discourse must pass'. (Jean Starobinski). Saus-

sure called these theme-words 'anagrams' or 'hypograms'. In another context he also uses the term 'paragrams'. Eg in Lucretius, the theme-word organising the discourse is the word: Aphrodite. Jean Starobinski published part of Saussure's *Anagrams* in *Mercure de France* (1964) and *Tel Quel* later published the entire remaining text of Saussure's work in issue no 37. In 1967, Julia Kristeva elaborated on Saussure's discovery and published her findings in her *Pour une Semiotique des Paragrammes*, reprinted in *Semiotike Recherches pour une semanalyse*, Paris 1969. In 1970, the magazine *Change* (no 6) denounced Kristeva's work, accusing it of philosophic revisionism, pointing towards Lenin's denunciation of Bogdanov's empiriosymbolism. Kristeva prefaced her essays with a quote from Saussure: 'The basic elements of expression, if they are to exist at all, must be algebraic. . . . One arrives at theorems which are subject to (mathematical) proof'. (1911).

8. The Standard Edition translates *Notes upon the Mystic Writing Pad*, but the German 'Wunderblock' also translates as 'magic' writing pad. The directors of the film have chosen to avoid the term 'mystic' for obvious reasons.

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